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THE WORKS

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM JAY,

OF ARGYLE CHAPEL, BATH.

COMPRISING

MATTER NOT HERETOFORE PRESENTED TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING

MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES.

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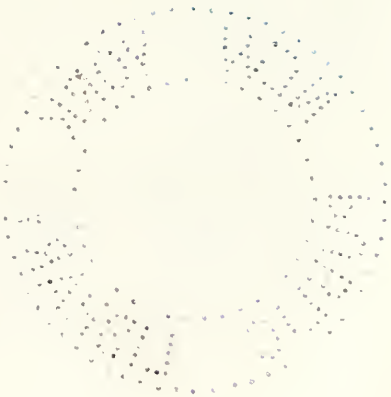

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MORNING EXERCISES

FOR

EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

MAR 13 1909

"Never be without a book in daily reading, of a direct Scriptural and devotional tendency."—HALE.

"The testimonies of thy grace,
I set before mine eyes;
Thence I derive my daily strength,
And *there* my comfort lies.
Thy word is everlasting truth;
How pure is every page!
That Holy Book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age."—WATTS.

"Not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure, and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom. What is more is fume,
Emptiness, or fond impertinence;
And renders us, in things that most concern,
Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek."—MILTON.

"The prophet who hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord."—JEREMIAH

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PREFACE.

A PUBLICATION is not rendered improper or needless because works of a similar nature have preceded it. Little would ever issue from the press if such a principle were admitted. For what new thing is there under the sun? Neither is an author in this case supposed to undervalue the labours of those who have gone before him. He only adds to their number, with his own probabilities of excitement. And *he* may awaken fresh attention in the minds even of those who have made use of his predecessors, while he may fall into the hands of some who have to begin this kind of reading. Every author, too, has not only his own connexions, but his own manner; and thus, as the tastes of readers vary, more individuals can be gratified.

The following pages, it is believed, will be found to differ a little from works of the same species; especially in making the Exercises always express more fully the import of the textual motto at the head of them; in the arrangement of a greater diversity of subjects; in the selection of more passages from the less observed and less improved parts of Scripture; and in the seizure of hints of instruction from the more indirect and incidental strokes of the Sacred Penmen.

The author confesses the work was much more arduous in the execution than he had apprehended in the prospect. The *chief* difficulty arose from the necessity of so much compression and brevity. It was found no easy thing, in two or three pages, not only to secure the spirit of the passage, but to give it some illustration and effect, by glimpses of scenery, and glances at historical facts, and traits of character, where diffusion and particularity were forbidden. While he makes no scruple to avow that this was his wish and design, he la ments sincerely that he has not more perfectly succeeded in accomplishing them. Leisure, and an *exclusive* dedication of himself to the plan for some months, or even weeks, might have yielded something more satisfactory. But complaint is useless, and apology vain. He has done, in his circumstances, what he could. And it yields him pleasure to think that, besides some other works of a general nature for the religious public, and especially several for the use of families, he has now produced something more particularly for the closet

The writer has always been attached to publications of this kind; and, from his own experience and observation, he is convinced of their adaptation to usefulness. He cannot but wish that Christians would read *the Scripture itself* more, and endeavour to *reflect themselves* on the passages which, either in a continued course, or in selections at the time, come before them. The power of doing this would improve by the use, and the pleasure and advantage resulting from the facility would amply reward any difficulty in the acquisition. But it is to be lamented, many do *not* reflect; and so the customary and cursory perusal, for *want of thought*, produces little impression; and the paragraph or chapter—or it may be even chapters—are immediately forgotten. But a verse or sentence, separately placed before the eye, is more distinctly remarked; and, being illustrated in a brief and lively comment, is more easily remembered. To supply such assistance cannot be reckoned an attempt to lead people from the Word of God, but to it; and it may teach those who use it, in time, to do for themselves what it may be necessary at first in another to do for them.

As to the subjects of these Exercises, the author has aimed to blend doctrine

experience, and practice together. There is danger of Antinomianism when the attention is *too exclusively* called to doctrinal points; of enthusiasm, when it is too exclusively attached to experimental; and of legality, when it is too exclusively confined to practical. It is the proportioned admixture of sentiment, feeling, and duty, that qualifies each, and renders them all not only safe, but profitable. The writer, also, has not limited himself to the usual mode of making the subjects of such meditations always of the *consolatory* kind. Christians, in the Divine life, want something besides comfort. They are to have their pure minds stirred up, by way of remembrance; to suffer the word of exhortation; to hear the reproofs of wisdom; to walk humbly with God, and wisely with men. Indeed, the best way to gain comfort is not always to seek it *directly*, but mediately; and the medium may require self-denial and patience. It is the same with comfort as with reputation; it is more certainly secured as a consequence, than by making it a mere design.

The writer has not often put the Exercise into the form of a soliloquy, or generally expressed himself in the language of the first person. He found the common mode of address better suited, especially to the explanatory and hortative parts of his design. Why should not the reader consider himself the *addressed*, rather than the *speaker?* and, by immediate *application*, make, as much as possible, the reflections his own?

As to the style itself, what was principally designed for pious use in retirement could not be too clear, and easy, and forcible, and pointed; too much abounding with terse briskness, and naïveté of expression; too free from the tameness and smoothness by which common but important truths are aided to slide down from the memory into oblivion.

In seven hundred and thirty Exercises, there may be some coincidences, and the same thought, image, or example, may occur more than once. It was hardly possible to prevent it, as the whole series could not be kept in memory, or be continually compared. As the work advanced, the subjects too frequently *increased* in length, beyond the bounds he had prescribed himself. The case was, the printer pressed upon him, and he had not time to be short.

But enough of this. The author commends the work to that part of the pious public who love and practise retreat; who wish not only to read the Scriptures alone, but to observe their beauties and advantages; who, while they neglect not their own meditations, are thankful to derive help from others, and often exclaim, "A word fitly spoken, how good is it!" who wish to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; who would not have their religion a visiter, but an inmate; who would speak of Divine things, not by a kind of artificial effort, but out of the abundance of the heart; and who know how much it conduces to our sanctification to keep the mind filled with good things, not only as these will exclude base intrusions, but will be sure to leave somewhat of their own tinge and likeness behind.

As to readers of *this* character, the author trusts the materials here furnished will not be unacceptable, of whatever religious denomination they may be found. He considers the community in which, by the providence of God, he himself labours, not as a party, but only as a part; and he is not an enemy to the whole army because he is attached to his own regiment. He does not oppose, but cooperate. He has not attempted in these volumes to conceal the leading sentiments which he holds; but he has not offensively obtruded them: nor has he availed himself of opportunities to bring forward those particular views, in subordinate matters, in which he may differ from others. He readily allows that every man has a right to state and defend the opinions which he has derived from conviction; but his love should abound in knowledge and in all judgment; and he should regulate the degree of his zeal by the importance of the subject. He is also persuaded that the statement and the defence should be effected in a work avowedly for the purpose, and not be introduced into a publication adapted

to general edification. How much less circulation and usefulness would Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion, and Alleine's Alarm, and other good books, have obtained, had their authors inserted their own minor partialities, and attacked those of others! In reading a valuable volume where such things are found, we *should* resemble the ox in the meadow, who, when he comes to a tuft of grass he dislikes, does not grow angry and attempt to tear it up with his hoofs and horns, but placidly leaves it, and feeds on in the large and rich pasturage. But all have not this "meekness of wisdom." The prejudices of many are powerful, and quickly excited; and meeting with a passage in the beginning of a work, by no means essential to its design, they throw it instantly aside, and lose all the pleasure and benefit it would otherwise have afforded them.

The work will meet the wishes of those who have not the command of much time for private engagements. And this is the case with many in our day, not only from the avocations of civil life, but even from the calls of religious beneficence. More leisure, indeed, in many instances, may be secured by earlier rising, and by more skill, and order, and diligence, in the management of all our affairs: yet the period in which we live is peculiar; and the calls of God to labour in doing good, in so many civil and sacred charities, leave it not *our* duty to retire and read by the hour as our forefathers did.

He hopes a book of this nature will be a suitable companion to those whose advanced years and infirmities will not allow of deep, and laborious, and lengthened perusals. What is preferable for them is something easy, and short, and *very Scriptural.* It is observable how much more aged believers delight in God's Word than in reading any other works. It is their "necessary food," and their "dainty meat," when their appetite for other things fails. It is their solace when the evil days are come, in which they have no pleasure. It is their support and their reliance in weakness and weariness; and they use it, not for amusement, but for relief only. Thus, we have seen a man walking forth gayly in the morning, carrying his staff under his arm, or twirling it in his hand; but, worn with the toils and fatigues of the day, we have seen him returning home in the evening, leaning and pressing it at every weary step.

The work, also, will suit the afflicted. Retirement and devotion seem congenial with trouble; and the sufferer naturally turns to them for succour and comfort. But many of the distresses of life prevent or abridge the resources they render so desirable and needful. What changes have many experienced by losses and reductions! They are called from freedom and ease to the care of thought, the shiftings of contrivance, and the exertion of labour. Where now is the leisure they once enjoyed for their secluded enjoyments of piety? Their hours of composure are fled, and have only left them hurried and broken moments. They can only sip of the brook in the way.

May the author presume that he may be of some little service to some of his brethren in the ministry; not only by aiding their retirement as Christians—and they have to save themselves as well as those that hear them—but by throwing out hints that may lead them to think for the pulpit, and furnishing, occasionally, outlines of discourses which they can have the merit of filling up?

He cannot, also, but wish to be useful to another interesting class, the sources of our future families, and the hopes of our churches. Here he is tempted to insert an extract from one of the letters he received, stimulating him to this undertaking. The name of the writer would add weight to his remarks; but it is suppressed, because he is not apprized of the liberty now taken, and his hints were not intended to meet the public eye. This excellent, and learned, and judicious friend thus expresses himself: "I have ventured to put upon paper the idea I have conceived of a series of daily contemplations or reflections which, among others, shall be adapted to be put into the hands of intelligent and educated *youth.* I have a sincere veneration for the intentions of Bogatzky and other similar authors, but there is such a paucity of thought, such a poverty of expression, such

a narrowed range of ideas, such a ringing of changes, incessantly, on a few topics, without gracefulness or variety, as to render the books exceedingly unattractive to the present rising generation. In these cases, I conceive we are bound to provide, as far as we can, that the food presented to their minds may not disgust by the manner in which it is served up; and that, when we put important truth in their way, it should be encumbered with as few external obstacles as the case will admit. Good sense, you have lately told us, is good taste; and that, I consider, is both good sense and good taste in devotion, which would present to every mind, without the sacrifice of a particle of Divine truth, such an exterior as may invite rather than repulse. He who has once been effectually gained over to the love of the Gospel, will retain his affection for it under a very homely form; but he who has yet to be won, will require of us some attention as to our first addresses to his understanding and his heart. My view, then, my dear sir, is, that the selection of texts should involve the whole range of revealed truth; and should present it in that combined form in which the Scripture exhibits it: where doctrine, and duty, and privilege blend like the colours that form the pure brightness of light; where religion is never exposed to view as a bare skeleton, but as endued with all the properties of life, and in actual existence. Pithy sayings, wise experiences, urgent examples, faithful warnings, should revolve daily beneath the eye, and show the reader all that religion has done for others; all it aims to do for him; and all the evils that result from the absence of her beneficence. Testimonies, also, such as that of Chesterfield to the Vanity of the World, which he had so fully tried; dying experiences, such as that of Rochester; confessions of the value of religion, such as are found in the Letters of Burns; and passages from eminent and striking lives, might be introduced in your own —— way, briefly prefaced or commented upon. Thus the whole might allure, by its variety; interest, by the reach of thought to which it leads; and profitably keep before the mind of youth, amidst daily temptations, what religion *can* do for them, and what the world and other things never can do."

Perhaps, however, if I am not accused of vanity in making this extract from my correspondent, I shall be chargeable with imprudence in publishing a recommendation which, though I admire, I have so much failed in following.

Percy Place, Dec. 26th, 1828.

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19. The Successful Follower.....Hos. vi. 3.
20. The Sinless Saviour..... ...1 John iii. 5.
21. The Divine Presence.....Exod. xxxiii. 14.
22. God the Husband of his Church Is. liv. 5.
23 Mutual Dependence.....Phil. iv. 2—4.
24. The Christian Obligation.....1 John ii. 6.
25. Impatience..... .....Ps. lv. 8.
26. Peter brought to Christ.....John i. 42.
27 Zeal to save.....John i. 42.
28. Zion's Sons..... .....Lam. iv. 2.
29. The Call to depart.....Micah ii. 10.
30. Filial Duty.....Mal. i. 6.

OCTOBER.

1. Death not always desirable....Amos v. 18.
2. The Noble Resolve.....Ps. lxxxv. 8.
3. Christian Moderation..... Phil. iv. 5.
4. The Shining Light.....Prov. iv. 18.
5. Christ entering Heaven.....1 Pet. iii. 22.
6. The Stranger and Sojourner....Ps. xxxix. 12.
7. The well-attended Flock.....Ezek. xxiv. 15.
8. Prayer and Thanksgiving.....Phil. iv. 6.
9. Adversity useful..... .....Hos. xiii. 5.
10. Changes in the Wilderness.....Num. x. 12.
11. The Ascending Saviour followed.Luke xxiv. 50, 51.
12. The Good Shepherd.....John x. 14.
13. Sparing Mercy.....Mal. iii 17.
14. Prosperity injurious.....Hos. xiii. 6.
15. Difference between Words and Deeds.....Deut. v. 28.
16. Brevity of the Scripture.....John xxi. 25.
17. The Alarm.....Rom. xiii. 11.
18. Confidence and Caution.....Ps. lxxxv. 8.
19. Inattention.....Is. xlii. 20.
20. The Blessed Sight.....Is. xxxiii. 17.
21. Divine Solicitude.....Deut. v. 29.
22. Design of the Incarnation.....John x. 10.
23. Life more abundantly.....John x. 10.
24. The Morning Star.....Rev. ii. 28.
25. The Door.....John x. 9.
26. The Subjects Agents too.....Jer. iv. 14.
27. The Clean Heart.....Jer. iv. 14.
28. The Blessedness of Loving God.1 Cor. viii. 3.
29. Prayer and Trouble.....Ps. lxxxvi. 7.
30. Messiah the Prince.....Dan. ix. 25.
31. Concern for the Best Cause.....Ps. lxxii. 15.

NOVEMBER.

1. How to read the Scriptures.... Luke x. 26.
2. The Season of Life.....1 Pet. iv. 2.
3. Joy in Sorrow.....2 Cor. vi. 10.
4. The Divine Healer.....Matt. viii. 7.
5. God for ever ours.....Ps. xlviii. 14.
6. The Revealer of Secrets.....Dan. ii. 28.
7. Unbelief of Christ's Brethren..John vii. 5.
8. Captiousness of the Pharisees..Matt. ix. 11.
9. The Whole and the Sick.....Matt. ix. 12.
10. Christ the Resurrection.....John xi. 25.
11. Joy in God's Salvation.....1 Sam. ii. 1.
12 God's Sole Agency.....Deut. xxxii. 12.
13. The Needful Disturbance.....Deut. xxxii. 11.
14. Divine Example.....Deut. xxxii. 11.
15. All-sufficient Assistance.....Deut. xxxii. 11.
16. God's Hidden Ones.....Ps. lxxxiii. 3.
17. The seed of the Messiah.....Ps. lxxxix. 36.
18. The Enlarged Prayer.....Ps. lxxxi. 10.
19. The Importance of Faith..... John ix. 35.
20. With Jesus in the Garden.....John xviii. 26.
21. Elisha's Sickness.....2 Kings xiii. 14.
22. Partial Zeal. .....2 Kings xiii. 19.
23. Elisha's Sepulchre.....2 Kings xiii. 20, 21.
24. Prosperity in the Divine Life...Ps. xcii. 12.
25. The Evidence of Faith.....John ix. 35.
26. The Resting-Place forgotten...Jer. l. 6.
27. Union of Faith and Love.....1 Tim. i. 14.
28. Habitual Piety.....Prov. xxiii. 17.
29. The Two Commandments.....1 John iii. 23.
30. The Personal Inquiry.....John ix. 35.

DECEMBER.

1. The Groundless Accusation....Job i. 9.
2. The Persevering Suppliant.....Matt. xv. 27.
3. Job's Confession.....Job xl. 4.
4. Knowledge of our Sinfulness...Job xiii. 23.
5. Our Peace in Trouble.....Micah v. 5
6. The Divine Defence.....Job i. 10.
7. The Coming Soul discouraged..Luke ix. 42.
8. The Apostle's Glorying .....2 Cor. xi. 30.
9. I am a Burden to myself.....Job vii. 20.
10. Sabbath Influences.....Rev. i. 10.
11. Job's Praying for his Friends.. Job xlii. 10.
12. The Marys at the Sepulchre....Matt. xxvi. 61.
13. The Wisdom of Zeal.....Phil. i. 9.
14. The Needless Alarm.....Job x. 2.
15. The Heavenly Shepherd.....Rev. vii. 17.
16. True Friendship.....1 Sam. xxiii. 16.
17. The Trial of the Scribe.....Matt. viii. 19, 20.
18. The Poverty of Jesus.....Matt. viii. 20.
19. New-born Citizens.....Ps. lxxxvii. 4, 5.
20. Jesus at the Feast.....John xi. 56.
21. The End of Affliction.....Job x. 2.
22. The Valuation of the Sabbath..Is. lviii. 13.
23. Attachment to Zion.....Ps. lxxxvii. 7.
24. The Dayspring.....Luke i. 78, 79.
25. Birth of Jesus.....Luke ii. 1—6.
26. The Angel with the Shepherds..Luke ii. 8, 9.
27. The Great Sight at Bethlehem..Luke ii. 15.
28. The Pious Pair.....Luke i. 6.
29. Strong Confidence... .....Job xiii. 15.
30. Brevity of Life.....Job x. 20.
31. Gratitude and Confidence.....Acts xxviii. 15.

MORNING EXERCISES

FOR

THE CLOSET.

JANUARY 1.

"On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle."—Exod. xl. 2.

And why was this period chosen for the erection? God has always reasons for his conduct; but he does not always "give account of any of his matters." We may however make two remarks here. First. Things that are the same to God, are not the same to us. Our goodness extendeth not to him: religion regards the exigences of man; and, when these are subserved, its provisions will be needless. John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem. All places are alike to God; yet we never feel in a common dwelling the solemnity that seizes us in the sanctuary. The first day of the year was no more to God than any other; but it would render the service more memorable and impressive to the people. Therefore says he, "On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle." Secondly. It is well to begin a new year with some good work; and to commence serving God after a new manner.

And have *we* no tabernacle to set up on this first day of this first month?

Let us begin the year with solemn reflection—and say, with Job, "When a few years are come I shall go the way whence I shall not return." Let me not only believe this; but think of it, and feel the importance of the sentiment. Yes in a little time I shall be no more seen. How—where—shall I be disposed of! The seasons will return as before: but the places that now know me will know me no more for ever. Will this be a curse? or a blessing? If I die in my sins I shall return no more to my possessions and enjoyments; to the calls of mercy; to the throne of grace; to the house of prayer! If I die in the Lord I shall, O blessed impossibility! return no more to these thorns and briers; to this vain and wicked world; to this aching head; to this throbbing heart; to these temptations and troubles, and sorrows and sins.

Let us begin the year with self-inspection—and say, with the chief butler, "I do remember my faults this day." We are prone to think of the failings of our fellow-creatures, and often imagine because we are free from *their* faults that we are faultless. But we may have other faults; we may have worse; and while a mote is in our brother's eye a beam may be in our own. Let us be open to conviction. Let us deal faithfully with our own hearts. Let us not compare ourselves with others, and especially the more vile of our fellow-creatures; but with our advantages; with our knowledge; with our professions; with the law of God.

Let us begin the year with a determination to abandon whatever appears sinful—and say, with Elihu, "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Should the evil course or the evil passion solicit, let it plead in vain while the Saviour-Judge says—"If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Begin the year with pious and personal dedication—and say, with David, "Lord, I am thine; save me." Through him who is the way yield yourselves unto God. It is your reasonable service. He has infinite claims to you. You will never be truly your own till you are his.

Begin the year with relative religion; and if the worship of God has never been established in your family, now commence it—and say, with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." A family without prayer is like a house without a roof. It is uncovered and exposed: and we know who has threatened to pour out his fury upon the families that call not upon his Name.

Begin the year with fresh concern to be

useful—and ask, with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Let me look at my condition; my resources; my opportunities. How can I glorify God and promote the welfare of my fellow-creatures? Is there not a Bible to spread? Are there not missionaries to support? Are there none perishing for lack of knowledge that I can myself instruct? Have I no irreligious neighbours to reclaim? Are there no poor to relieve? No widows and fatherless to visit?

Begin the year with more conduct in the arrangement of your affairs, and resemble Ezra and his brethren, who "did according to the custom, as the duty of every day required." God has said let every thing be done decently and in order. Much of your comfort will arise from regularity in your meals, in your devotions, in your callings; and your piety will be aided by it. Have a place to receive every thing; an end to simplify it; a rule to arrange it. Leave nothing for the morrow that ought to be discharged today. Sufficient for each period will be its own claims; and your mind ought to be always at liberty to attend to fresh engagements.

Finally. Time, this short, this uncertain, this all-important time, upon every instant of which eternity depends, will not allow of our trifling away any of its moments. Resolve therefore to redeem it. Gather up its fragments that nothing be lost. Especially rescue it from needless sleep; and if you have hitherto accustomed yourself to the shameful indulgence of lying late in bed, begin the new year with the habit of early rising; by which you will promote your health and improvement of every kind, and live much longer than others in the same number of days—and say, with David, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord: in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

And if this be your determination, the season will be the date of your happiness. God himself says, "From this day will I bless you."

JANUARY 2.

"I will surely do thee good."—Gen. xxii. 12.

This is a blessed assurance with which to enter a new year, not knowing what a day may bring forth. But what have *we* to do with this promise? It was indeed given immediately to Jacob; but it equally belongs to every Israelite indeed; for he never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. Promises made on particular occasions are intended for general use and advantage. Paul, referring to the words with which God had encouraged Joshua, applies them to the believing Hebrews: "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." And Hosea, alluding to God's intercourse with Jacob even at Bethel, says, "And there he talked with *us*."

The very brevity of the promise is a recommendation. We complain of our memories; but we can retain these six golden words, "I WILL SURELY DO THEE GOOD." It is also the better for being indefinite. Some promises ensure an individual blessing: but we are a mass of wants; and this assurance is a comforter that meets every fear, every anxiety, every wish. It sets the mind completely at rest with regard to any possible contingencies. It tells us to be "careful for nothing." It enjoins us to "cast all our care upon him, for *he* careth for us." But though specifying nothing in particular, the promise leaves our hope to range at large—yet it is to keep within the compass of our *real* welfare, "They that seek the Lord shall not want any *good* thing." "I will surely do thee *good*." Now the meaning of this assurance must be understood, or else it will not harmonize with experience. The people of the world have often reproached those who profess to be the blessed of the Lord, with their poverty and distress; and have asked, "Where is *now* your God?" And they themselves have sometimes been perplexed and dismayed. Gideon said, "If God be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us?" And Jacob said, "All these things are against me." In an agreeable mansion, and enjoying all the comforts of life, no difficulty may be felt from the language of God: but what is Joseph in prison—what is Job among the ashes—what is he who says, All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning—what is *he* to make of the promise—"I will surely do thee good?" We must confide in the judgment of God, and distrust our own. We are short-sighted; and easily imposed upon by appearances; and know not what is good for us in this vain life which we spend as a shadow. But *he* cannot be mistaken. A wise father will choose far better for his infant than the infant can choose for himself. We must always distinguish between what is pleasing and what is profitable. Correction is not agreeable to the child; yet it is so good for him, that he who spareth the rod, hateth his son. Medicine is unpalatable; but it is good for the patient, and renewed health will more than reconcile him even to the expense of it. The vine-dresser does the tree good, not by suffering the wanton shoots to grow on draining the sap, but by pruning it that it may bring forth more fruit. What said David? "It is good for me"—that I have prospered? that I have risen from obscurity? that I conquered Goliath? that I gained a victory in the Valley of Salt? No: but it is

good for me—that Doeg impeached me, that Saul hunted me like a partridge on the mountains, that Absalom drove me from my palace, that Shimei cursed me on the hill, that sickness brought down my life to the ground—it is good for me that I have been afflicted." We must also look to the conclusion of events. Things good in themselves, with regard to us may result in evil: and things evil in themselves may issue in good. Abraham spake according to our present estimations when he said to the rich man, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things." But had we known them both before death, and been assured that the one would have been comforted, and the other tormented so soon, we should have judged the poverty and distresses of Lazarus to have been the "good things," and the wealth and luxury of the rich man the "evil things." All is ill that ends ill: and all is well that ends well.

But let us believe the truth of this declaration. There are four steps by which we may reach the conclusion. The first regards his sufficiency. He is *able* to do us good. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. There is no enemy but he can conquer; no exigence but he can relieve. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can *ask* or *think*.—The second regards his inclination. He is *disposed* to do us good. His love is not only real, but passes knowledge. He feels towards us as his jewels, his friends, his children, his bride. He rests in his love, and joys over us with singing.—The third regards his engagement. He is *bound* to do us good. We have not only his word, but his oath; an oath sworn by himself, because he could swear by no greater; and confirmed by the blood of an infinite sacrifice.—The fourth regards his conduct. He *has* done us good. We have had complaints enough to make of others; but of him we are compelled to say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." His goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives. How often has he turned the shadow of death into the morning!

But when I look at the cross I see not only proof but demonstration. He *has* done already far more than *remains* to *be* done. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

JANUARY 3.

And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."—Josh. v. 12.

This cessation of the manna is one of the several remarkable occurrences at the crossing of the river Jordan. God is every thing to his people. In the wilderness they had no path-way; but he led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were in danger; but he was their defence. They had no abode; but he was their dwelling-place. They had no water; but he gave them streams in the desert. They had no provision; but he rained down manna around their tents. So that what nature refused, Providence furnished; and what could not be derived from the ground came from the clouds.

When the supplies they brought with them from Egypt were spent, they feared they were going to perish. They forgot the hand that had dried up the sea; and said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? But he gave them bread from heaven, and for forty years they did eat angel's food. What an abundance was necessary for such a multitude! And what a display of divine power was here witnessed!—Nor less was it a proof of divine mercy. Had he dealt with them after their desert fire would have come down from heaven, instead of food: but as the mother silences the fretful angry child by giving it not the rod, but the breast, so did his gentleness indulge them. Hence when they despised the manna as light food, it might have been suspended, and they might have been left to learn the worth of it by the want: but day after day, year after year, it continued to attend them; and ceased not till the day after they had taken possession of their inheritance, and they had eaten of the old corn of the land.

At length it *did* cease; and wisely too. What was necessary before became needless now: and what want had endeared, abundance would have despised. This teaches us not to look for extraordinary supplies when relief is to be had in an ordinary way. He who sustained Israel is as almighty as ever; but *we* must plough and sow and gather into barns. He who fed Elijah by ravens commands *us* to labour, working with our hand the thing that is good. If a man neglects the means of subsistence he is not trusting Providence, but tempting it; and is likely to be reminded by something more than Scripture, that if any man will not work neither shall he eat. Even in miraculous achievements what human agency *could* do, was not done supernaturally. When Peter was in prison the angel of the Lord opened the door and broke off his fetters—for this Peter could not have done; but he did not take him up in his arms, and carry him out; but said unto him, "Follow me." Miracles were never needlessly employed. Had they been common they would have ceased to be marvellous; the exceptions would have become a general rule; and the whole system of Nature and Providence have been deranged.

The manna was typical. "*I* am," said Jesus, "that bread of life." As the manna

came down from heaven and preserved the Israelites from famine; "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And the Saviour surpasses the emblem. The manna was for the body; he saves the soul. The manna could not preserve from death always; but they who partake of him live for ever. The manna was confined to *one* people; he gave his flesh for the life of the world. He therefore is the *true* bread.

And shall this cease? Far from it. You shall live by him, as well as with him, for ever.

Yet there will be a great difference between your present and your future experience. Many things now necessary will then be done away. Conjecture, opinion, reasoning will give place to knowledge. Now we walk by faith; then we shall walk by sight. Now we are saved by hope; then hope will cease in fruition. Love will continue for ever; but charity and mercy can have no object, no exercise there. We shall be still praising him; but prayer, and preaching, and baptism, and the Lord's supper, will have no place. We can dispense with the channels when we are at the fountain-head; and with the types when we have the reality. We are now glad when they say unto us, "Let us go into the house of the Lord;" but says John, "I saw no temple there; but the glory of God and of the Lamb were the light thereof." When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away. The fare of the wilderness will be superseded by the produce of Canaan.

JANUARY 4.

"*As thy days so shall thy strength be.*"
Deut. xxxiii. 25.

Dr. Doddridge was one day walking much depressed, his very heart desolate within him. But, says he, passing a cottage door open, I happened at that moment to hear a child reading, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The effect on my mind was indescribable. It was like life from the dead. Much is often done by a word: and many can say with Watts,

> "And when my spirit takes her fill
> At some good word of thine,
> Not warriors, who divide the spoil,
> Have joys compared with mine."

And what does *this* word say to *us?* "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." There is strength bodily. The continuance of this is a mercy. How soon, how easily can it be crushed or reduced, so that we may be made to possess months of vanity; and endure wearisome nights; and feel every exertion a difficulty, and every duty a burden! But there is strength spiritual. This is very distinguishable from the former, and often found separate from it. The Lord does not always give his people a giant's arm, or an iron sinew; but *his* strength is made perfect in weakness. This is the strength here spoken of. For two purposes his people find it necessary: *service* and *suffering*.

Every Christian has a course of duty common to him as a man. It is to provide for his outward wants, and the support of his family. And this is done by labour, in which he is required not to be slothful. But there is a series of duties pertaining more immediately to him in his religious character. It is to believe, to pray, to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present evil world. The discharge of this high calling is sometimes expressed by a race, which he is to run with patience. Sometimes also by the life of a soldier. A soldier must not be effeminate, but endure hardness and fatigue. Even his preparations and exercises are often trying—how much more his actual services! And the Christian's enemies possess every thing that can render them formidable—and so fights he, not as one that beateth the air.

Suffering is commonly connected with service in the divine life. It was so invariably in the beginning of the Gospel. Then it was deemed impossible for any one to live godly in Christ Jesus and not suffer persecution. Therefore no sooner was Paul converted than he was told how great things he had to suffer. As real religion is always the same, some degree of the same opposition may be always looked for; and the hatred of the world *will* be shown as far as they have liberty to express it, and are not restrained by law or the usages of civilized life. But when the Christian has rest from such trials as these, God can subserve their purpose by personal and relative afflictions, which are often severer than even the endurings of a martyr. They are called chastenings and rebukes, which he is neither to despise or faint under. They have been the experience of all God's children from age to age. They are not wantonly inflicted; but there is a needs be for them, of which their Heavenly Father is the unerring judge; and who—as far as their education and welfare will allow—will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Now the prospect of all this, when he looks forward into life, is enough to awaken the Christian's anxiety; and nothing can effectually encourage him but the discovery of strength equal to his exigencies. And this he finds not in *himself*. The natural man has no sensibility of his weakness, because he is not earnestly engaged in those applications which require spiritual strength. The Christian is. He knows that he is as desti-

tute of strength as he is of righteousness. He feels himself entirely insufficient for all the duties and trials of the divine life. And the consciousness, instead of diminishing, grows with the experience of every day.

And he need not be afraid of this. Rather let him cherish it; for when he is weak then he is strong. What he wants is provided and ensured by the promise of a God who cannot lie—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." And as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God. His veracity has been attested by all his people, not one failing. And what says our own experience! "Year after year I have been travelling in an enemy's country, and carrying with me an evil heart, prone to depart from the living God. I have often said, I shall one day perish. But where am I this morning?—Following hard after God, his right hand upholding me. My prayers have not been always lively and delightful; but I have looked again towards his holy temple; and through many a benighted hour I have waited for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning. I have had no might of my own, and have been often faint; but he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. This is my testimony to the praise of the glory of his grace; and at the beginning of another year I thank God and take courage—

"Here I raise my Ebenezer:
Hither by thy help, I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home."

JANUARY 5.

"*And they cast their crowns before the throne.*"
Rev. iv. 10.

Religion distinguishes and elevates. The possessors of it begin to rise on earth; but their dignity is perfected and displayed in heaven.

There they are *crowned*. Racers were crowned. Conquerors were crowned. Benefactors who had saved the life of a fellow-citizen were crowned. Bridegrooms were crowned—Solomon's mother crowned him in the day of his espousals. Princes on their ascension were crowned. The saints on high are every one of these characters in themselves; and the crown each wears is called "a crown of righteousness;" "a crown of life;" "a crown of glory that fadeth not away;" a crown divinely superior to the prize of mortal ambition—"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

Yet if they are thus honoured, "they cast their crowns before the throne" they approach; testifying by this action from whom they have received them, and confessing that they deem themselves unworthy to wear the honour—all in conformity with the peculiar design of the Gospel-constitution, "that no flesh should glory in *his presence*," but "according as it is written, he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord."

It is no easy thing to bring a man to this temper of mind. It is not natural to him. Naturally he is as proud as he is poor. Therefore he would be wise, though born as a wild ass's colt. Therefore though poverty itself, he says, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. Therefore though without strength, he trusts in his own heart; and though guilty before God, he goes about to establish his own righteousness. Therefore he is impatient under his affliction, as if he had a right to complain; and unthankful under his mercies, as if he deserved them.

The day of conviction is a day of self-abasement; and in that day the lofty looks of man are brought low. Then he submits himself to God, and begins to walk humbly with him: he admires the patience that has borne with him, and adores the abundant mercy that has saved and called him. The more he advances in the divine life, the more he sinks in his own estimation. "I, who am but dust and ashes." "Behold, I am vile." "Who am I, and what is my father's house?" "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." The "latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." "I am not worthy to be called an apostle." "I am less than the least of all saints."—These have been the self-annihilations of men who were all great in the sight of the Lord: and these must be the best proofs, as they will be the certain effects, of *our* growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.

Ignorance is the pedestal of pride; throw down the basis, and the figure falls. But here our knowledge is not complete; hereafter we shall see things in God's own light. Then we shall have other views than we now have of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; of the number and aggravations of our offences; of the greatness of our guilt and desert; of the vastness of our obligations; of the wonders of that love that passeth knowledge in every part of our salvation. Thence will result that fine ingenuous feeling that shrinks back, and is ready to decline a distinguished privilege—not from dislike or unwillingness to be under obligation; but from a sense of unworthiness. Did Peter wish to be abandoned of Christ? Yea he placed all his happiness in his presence: but it was under this feeling on the sight of the miracle, he exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Some would not think of such abdications, were they to enter heaven with their present principles and dispositions; they would rather view their crowns as of their own deserving,

and their own procuring: and feel the spirit of a late emperor, who too proud to receive *his* diadem from any other hand than his own, placed himself the crown upon his head. But that world is a world of humility and gratitude. All the dignitaries there cast their crowns before the throne of the Saviour in whose righteousness they are exalted—still praising *him*, and saying—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto *us*, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake."

Now whatever heaven is, we must be disposed and prepared for it before we can enter it. Has then God wrought us for the self-same thing? Has he brought down the pride of our nature, and made us willing to "submit ourselves unto the righteousness of God?" Are we saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?" Is the leading sentiment of the BLESSED now living in our hearts and reigning in our lives—"BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM. NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME?"

JANUARY 6.

"*Unite my heart to fear thy name.*"
Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

THE fear of God does not here mean a particular grace of the Spirit, but religion at large. It is common to all writers to express the whole of a thing by a part; but then it ought to be an essential, and a distinguishing part. And "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and "we perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Religion is nothing without the heart. Yet naturally the heart is alienated from the life of God, and hangs off loosely and carelessly from all the spiritualities of his service. But it must be drawn and attached to divine things; and God alone can accomplish this union. Without his agency indeed there may be an outward and professional union; but the ligatures of faith and love which are in Christ Jesus will be wanting. To him therefore must we give the glory of the work if it has been effected, and to him we must repair if we desire to experience it; encouraged by the assurance, that he will not fail to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

But how may I know that he has united my heart to his fear? When we are attached to a thing we love to hear of it: we think much of it; speak much of it: we delight to remember it. If we are cordially united to an individual, he shares our sympathy; we feel his interests to be our own; we weep when he weeps, and rejoice when he rejoices. It is the same with a man that is cordially attached to religion; he feels himself to be one with it: when it is assailed, he will endeavour to defend it; when it is wounded in the house of its friends, he will feel the pain: the reproach of it will be his burden; he will pray for its success; he will exult in its prosperity. Are we cordially united to any one? In the same degree we dislike absence, and dread separation. Thus the attached Ruth said to Naomi, "Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." And what is the language of a soul under this divine influence? "Why shouldest thou be a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" "Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

But was not David's heart united to the fear of God before? It was. But he who has the dawn wishes for the day. He in whom the good work is begun will always pray, "Perfect that which concerneth me." Who can say I have attained? I am already perfect? David as a backslider prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me:" but there was no period in his life, or advancement in his religion, at which he would not have used the very same prayer—

"Whoever says, 'I want *no more*,'
Confesses he has *none*."

The Christian, as long as he feels any reluctance to duty; any dulness in his work; any distractions in his worship; any law in his members warring against the law of his mind; any reason to sigh when I would do good evil is present with me, and how to perform that which is good I find not—will not cease to pray, "Unite my heart to fear thy name."

"Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought."

JANUARY 7.

"*Salute my well-beloved Epenetus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia unto Christ.*"—Rom. xvi. 5.

PAUL here remembers many, and speaks of them all with affection; but he salutes Epenetus as his WELL-*beloved*. We are not bound to love all in the same manner, or in the same degree.

The Apostle calls this convert, "fruits unto *Christ*"—not unto *himself*. Yet he had been the means of bringing him to the knowledge of the truth. But Paul knew that *he*

had not redeemed him; justified him; called him by *his* grace. And as to his conversion, he had only been the *instrument*, the Lord working with him, and confirming his word with signs following. In another place he says, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" If converted sinners are the seal, and reward, and glory, and joy of the preacher; they are infinitely more so, of the Saviour himself. *He* sees in them his agency; his image; the travail of his soul; the recompence of his sufferings. As the author of it; he will enjoy their blessedness, and receive their praises for ever.

Epenetus is here said to be the "*first*-fruits unto Christ in *Achaia*." Yet Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye know the house of Stephanas, that *it* is the first-fruits of Achaia." The apparent difficulty is easily solved by the fact, that the house of Stephanas was the first family that was converted, but that Epenetus was the first convert in the family. Christians at first were few in number, and driven together by persecution. They were therefore well known to each other, and to their ministers. They were marked characters. The conversion of a man to christianity in a heathen place must have been peculiarly *observable*. It was the production of "a new creature," which would of course be greatly wondered at. It was displaying the "heavenly" where all was "earthly, and sensual, and devilish," before. And we see it was *worthy* of attention. Earthly minds are most interested by the events of this life; by the policy of statesmen, the exploits of heroes, the discoveries of philosophers—but what Paul noticed in Achaia, was the first man that was called there out of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. He knew that the conversion of one soul far transcended in importance the deliverance of a whole kingdom from civil bondage. Kingdoms will soon be no more; but such a soul will shine a monument of grace and glory for ever and ever. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

How long Epenetus in the place and in the family stood *alone* as a professed Christian, we know not; but it is no uncommon thing for an individual to be similarly situated. We have often seen single converts seeking and serving Christ, as the first-fruits of the neighbourhood or the household wherein they lived. The way in which, and the means by which these persons are brought forward before others, would, if stated, be found to be very various, and often remarkable. Hearing the Gospel while from home; visiting in a family where the worship of God is maintained; meeting with a good book; receiving a letter from a friend; a conversation with a stranger; an affliction that made the heart bleed, and laid bare the prospects of life—where shall we end? "Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living!" For though the incidents upon which this mighty event hinged seemed perfectly casual, they were all arranged by his own purpose and grace.

And the circumstances in which these *first* converts are placed are a post of *trial*. Sometimes the trial is very severe. They have to take up their cross daily and hourly too; and a cross too heavy to be borne without divine aid. Little do many who have been religiously brought up, and whose relations and friends if not decidedly pious, are not hostile—little do they know what some have to endure, especially at the commencement of their religious course; when, instead of assistance and countenance so much needed, they meet with neglect, and opposition, and sneers, and reproach from all around them—and from all that are dear to them.

—They are also in a post of *duty*. They are required to be not only harmless and blameless, but most exemplary in their language, temper, and conduct. The reason is that they will attract peculiar notice. Every thing they do will be canvassed by a shrewdness sharpened by enmity, and ready to magnify every failing. *They* will be judged by their profession; and their religion will be judged by *them*. And they are to put gainsayers to silence, and constrain them by their good works which they behold to glorify God in the day of visitation. They are to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and by walking in wisdom to win those that are without. They are not to repulse by rudeness, or chill by disdain. They are never to betray a feeling that says, Stand by thyself; come not near to me—I am holier than thou. They are not, by stiffness and affectations in little and lawful things, to lead people to suppose that their religion is made up of oddities and perversenesses. Yet, in things of unquestionable obligation and real importance, they must be firm and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: for not only will conscience require this, in the testimony they are always to bear for God; but such *consistency* alone will enthrone them in the convictions and esteem of others,

—For they are also in a post of *honour*. They have a peculiar opportunity of showing their principles. Later converts may be equally conscientious, but *these* coming after, when they have the sanction and co-operation of others, cannot so obviously appear to be on the Lord's side, nor so fully evince the purity and power of their motives, as those who come forward *alone*, and say to all others, however numerous, however influential, however endeared—Choose you this day whom you will serve—but as for me—I will

serve the Lord. They have therefore the privilege of taking the lead, and of being examples instead of followers. And they may be, and are likely to be, the means of prevailing upon others. We have seldom seen an instance of failure. The effect has not always immediately appeared; but where they have been enabled to walk worthy of God unto all pleasing, after a while, they have no longer gone *alone* to the Cross of Christ, to the Throne of Grace, to the House of God, but in company—in company even with those who once stood aloof, or before, even opposed. And "he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

JANUARY 8.

"*Behold, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*"—3 Epis. John, 2.

It has been supposed from hence, that Gaius had an infirm and sickly constitution. This is probable; but it does not necessarily follow: for John might have wished him the continuance and increase of health, as well as the restoration of it.

However this may be, we learn from his language—That it is allowable for us to pray for temporal blessings—and that of all these blessings, health is the most valuable and necessary.

But is outward prosperity—is even health itself the chief good—that, "above all things," John wishes his friend to enjoy it? Some therefore have rendered it, "I wish above all persons;" others, "I wish in all respects;" that thou mayest prosper and be in health. But there is no need of criticism here. Gaius had grace already; and a high degree of it; and this one thing needful being secured, it was *then* supremely desirable that he should have health to enjoy and improve it—"even as his soul prospered."

John makes also, his soul-prosperity the standard and rule of his prayer for other things. This would be a dreadful rule with regard to many. Such praying if answered would ruin them. Yes, if they were to prosper in temporal things *as* they prosper in spiritual, they would become the poorest, meanest wretches on earth; for they are strangers to every thing like the true riches. And if their bodies were to be as healthful *as* their souls, their dwelling would become an hospital; their bed of ease a bed of languishing: they would be blind, for they have no spiritual understanding; deaf, for they never hear the voice of God; dead, for the Spirit of God is not in them.

Yet this seems to be the only safe rule. For unless religion keeps pace with our outward good, our safety and welfare will be endangered by it. We are not afraid when we see Christians succeeding in life, if at the same time they grow in grace. But the peril is, when there is so much sail and so little ballast. What can be more awful than to see those who too much mind earthly things, gaining abundantly; to see those who have a relish for the pride of life, enabled to be splendid; to see those much indulged, who cannot put a knife to the throat of appetite? If our plenty and dainties awaken in us no moral apprehensions; and if we can feast ourselves without fear; surely our table is likely to become a snare, and that which should have been for our welfare, to become a trap. The prosperity of fools destroys them; and the prosperity of those who have not *much* wisdom, injures them.

Let us therefore examine our wishes. Let us regulate them piously. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Let us ask for no more of other things than we can bear—ever praying, for our friends and ourselves, that we may prosper and be in health even as our *souls prosper.*

JANUARY 9.

"*He will be our guide even unto death.*"
Psalm xlviii. 14.

This assurance comes home to our case and feelings. We are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. We resemble the Jews in the wilderness; we are not in Egypt, and we are not in Canaan, but journeying from the one to the other. We are delivered from our natural state; but before we can enter glory,

> "We have this desert world to pass;
> A dangerous and a tiresome place."

And as the Jews were not left to themselves, but had a conductor, so have we—"This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." How perfectly, how infinitely qualified is he for this office! In a journey, it is unnecessary for the traveller to know the road: but the guide ought to know it; and when *he* is well acquainted with it, and we have full confidence in him, we shall feel satisfaction notwithstanding our own ignorance. Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went; but he knew *with whom:* and Job, after expressing his perplexities, and the successlessness of his efforts to explore the dispensation he was under, relieves himself with this thought: "But he knoweth the way that I take."

> "Oh, who so fit to choose our lot,
> And regulate our ways,"

as He who sees the end from the beginning; who knows all our walking through this great wilderness; who cannot mistake as to what is good or evil for us; and who has said, "I

will bring the blind by a way that they know not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." If we had a wise and sure, but a sullen and silent leader, it would deduct much from the pleasure of the journey. But our Guide indulges us with constant intercourse. He allows us to address *him* whenever we please, and in every thing by prayer and supplication to make known our requests; while he condescendingly addresses *us*, talking with us by the way, and opening to us the Scriptures. He is also equal to all our exigences. Do we want food? refreshment? rest? He can supply all our need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Have we storms? "He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Are we exposed to enemies? What David said to Abiathar, who had fled to him in his jeopardy, HE says to us, "Abide with me; for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." I should not be afraid of the sights and howlings of the wood, if I had a lion at my right hand every step, and could depend upon his fidelity—A lion is the strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any. More than this is our privilege—

> "A thousand savage beasts of prey
> Around the forest roam,
> But Judah's Lion guards the way,
> And guides the traveller home."

What human patience could bear with our manners and provocations! What creature-conductor is there, but would throw up his charge long before the journey's end! But he does not cast away his people. He *never leaves* nor forsakes them. This is their comfort; this is their hope; this is their security—the long-suffering of our God is salvation. "I, the Lord, change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Yes—he will be our guide, "even unto death; that is, till the journey is over, and all its cares cease. But is nothing more necessary? TO death is much—but THROUGH death seems better. When we come to the entrance of the gloomy passage, it is pleasing to think that he is at the other side, and will receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also. Yet how am I to get THROUGH? "My flesh and my heart faileth"—

> "Oh, if my Lord would *come*, and MEET—
> My soul would stretch her wings in haste;
> Fly fearless through Death's iron gate,
> Nor feel the terrors as she pass'd."

And this case is provided for. All is insured. He will be with us THROUGH—"Yea, though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou *art with me:* thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."—*Amen.*

JANUARY 10

"*A devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house; which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*"—Acts x. 2.

WE should beware of general and indiscriminate reflections upon communities and professions. They are injurious; they tend to make and keep the parties what they are generally supposed to be. They are unjust; for there are always exceptions. And they are ungenerous; for the more temptations men have to resist, the more evils they have to subdue, the more difficulties they have to struggle with—the more deserving and commendable is the individual that succeeds: or, rather, the more is the grace of God glorified in him. Can there be no excellency connected with arms? In the New Testament we meet with no less than four centurions, and all are spoken of with approbation—the centurion who came to our Lord on the behalf of his servant—the centurion that watched and confessed at the Cross—the centurion that behaved so courteously to Paul in his voyage—and Cornelius, here spoken of.

He is supposed to have been a proselyte, but he was not. Yet he worshipped God, the knowledge of whom he probably obtained by residing with his men in Judea. He was a "devout man;" and three fine unions are mentioned in his character and conduct.

—A union of *personal* and *relative duty:* "*He* feared God, *with* all his house." This was like Joshua, who said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord:"—not my house without myself, nor myself without my house; but I, *and* my house. If we are godly ourselves, we shall surely give evidence of it by instructing and admonishing and impressing those who are placed under our care. And in vain shall we use the means, if we counteract them by our own example. We must do, as well as teach.

—A union of *piety* and *morality:* he *gave alms* and *prayed.* Piety is more than prayer; and morality is more than alms: yet alms and prayer are not only parts, but essential parts of them; and they can never be separated. Some talk of their love to the Gospel, and their communion with God, who are hard-hearted, and close-handed. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Others stand fair with their fellow creatures, and are distinguished by liberality and kindness, yet they have no fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; they live without God; they indulge their sensual passions, and imagine that charity covers a multitude of sins—"But pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world."

—A union of the *real* and *eminent* in religion: "He gave *much* alms to the people, and prayed to God *always*." There cannot be the eminence of grace without the reality; but there may be the reality without the eminence. We should be thankful for a day of small things; but we should seek after a day of great ones. We should add to the essentials of religion its excellences too. We should not only have life, but have it more abundantly.

As to our temporal condition, we should be content with such things as we have. But contentment does not become us in divine things. There we should be ambitious. There we should be covetous. We need more. And more is attainable. Let us, therefore, enlarge our desires and our hopes, and seek to be filled with all the fulness of God.

JANUARY 11.

"*Where dwellest thou?*"—John i. 38.

This question was addressed to our Lord by two of John's disciples. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother; of the other we are ignorant; but they were now both following Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saith unto them, "What seek ye?" They said unto him, "Rabbi, Where dwellest thou?"

Let us consider, the principle of the inquiry. It was not curiosity, but regard. It was as much as to say, we wish to be better acquainted. John had spoken of him highly, and they had just seen him: but this, instead of satisfying them, drew forth their desire after more intimacy. Now this is common to all the subjects of divine grace. It arises from *their love to him.* For love longs to be near the object of attachment: separation is painful; distance is intolerable; while intercourse yields a pleasure words can no more describe, than paint can express light or heat. Hence the believer longs to be with the Saviour. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside from the paths of thy companions?" The desire arises also from the *want of him.* What can I do, says the Christian, without him? He is my deliverer, my helper, my guide, my comforter. The earth can do better without the sun, than I can do without him, the Sun of righteousness. The body does not depend so much upon the soul, as I do upon him the quickening Spirit. Who can screen me from the condemnation of the Law? Who can relieve my burdened conscience? Whose grace is sufficient for me, to sanctify me in prosperity, to sustain me in adversity, to enliven me in death? "Oh, cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." I must live in the same place, the same house, the same room, where thou dwellest—"Where dwellest thou?"

But let us find if we can an answer to this question. "He saith unto them, Come and see;" and they went, and "saw where he dwelt." In a general way, he had not where to lay his head. It is not probable he had now a house to himself, but only an apartment hired or borrowed. But how was that lodging sanctified and honoured! They showed Alexander, when in Holland, a house where Peter the Great resided, and which is preserved in memory of him. Many have seen at Olney the alcove where Cowper wrote his "Task"—Oh, to have seen a dwelling where Jesus resided! But where dwells he now? He *is* everywhere, but he is not said to *dwell* everywhere. Dwelling, with regard to him, implies preference, and abiding with delight. First, then, he dwells in heaven. This marks the place, yea—this makes it. "Where I am, there shall my servants be." "Absent from the body and present with the Lord." Secondly, He dwells in his Church. "This," says he, "is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Thirdly, He dwells in the sanctuary. "In all *places* where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." "*Where* two or three are gathered together in my name, *there* am I in the midst of them." And there his people have found him, and exclaimed, "Surely God is in this place." Fourthly, He dwells in the heart. He will reject every other residence you may offer him. "My son," says he, "give me thine heart;" and from every believer, he obtains what he demands—Christ dwells in his "heart by faith."

This may be called *enthusiasm* by some; but it is the language of Inspiration. "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."

Let me forbear to injure and insult a Christian. Let me revere and honour him. He is a palace of the Prince of Peace. He is a temple of the Lord of all.

Let me admire the condescension and kindness of Immanuel, God with us; and if I am the subject of this residence, let me not only rejoice in the dignity and privilege, but be concerned to discharge every duty I owe to such a distinguished guest, to such a divine inhabitant! "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

JANUARY 12.

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."—Exod. xiii. 17, 18.

THERE were two ways which they might have taken to their destination. One was from the north of Egypt to the south of Canaan. This was short and direct, and would have required but a few days, as we see in the case of Jacob's sons when they fetched corn, and in the rapid incursion of a late military chief. The other was very much farther and very indirect. Yet God took this; and instead of leading them to the Isthmus of Suez, he conducted them to the border of the Red Sea. He therefore declined the common road which the people would have chosen, and which every one else might have recommended, and selected the most unlikely.

For his thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are his ways our ways. And the promise is, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." It is well that we are under his guidance; for the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. We know not what is good for us; and like children left to themselves, we should soon run into mischief. We are too ignorant, too selfish, too carnally minded, to choose for ourselves safely. How was it with the Jews in the time of Moses? They must have flesh—and God gave them their heart's desire, but sent leanness into their souls. And was it not the same in the days of Samuel? They would have a king—and God gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath. And how has it been with ourselves? Have we not often been imposed upon both by our hopes and fears? Have we not anxiously desired what we now see would have proved injurious? And have we not been eager to escape what we now know to be a blessing? If our bones have not been broken, have we not been bruised by the falls occasioned by our own rashness and folly? If we have not been thrown out of the vehicle, have we not endangered it enough to induce us to give back the reins into the proper hand! Surely we are not *yet* leaning to our own understanding; but committing our way unto the Lord. Surely we are *now* saying, The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us.

It is acknowledged that the course declined "was near." But God being the judge, the nearest way is not always the best. Jacob, in obtaining the blessing, went the nearest way to work in imposing upon his blind father; but God's way would have been better, though it would have taken more time. Joseph's dreams might have been fulfilled by constraining his brethren to pay him immediate obeisance. But more than twenty years must previously elapse, and he must be sold into Egypt as a slave, and be imprisoned as a criminal, and be released as an interpreter, and possess all the store of the land as a deliverer. The thing was true; but the time appointed was long. Yet the Lord's time is the best: and the fruit we covet will be much more rich and wholesome when ripe, than if seized and devoured while green. He that believeth therefore maketh not haste. "This world is a Mesech, and my soul is vexed with the conversation of the wicked—Why is not my taste gratified! And why am I not allowed to enter the region of purity and peace?" Because your principles are to be tried and exemplified. Because you are to serve your generation by the will of God. "How long have I waited for an answer to prayer, for a deliverance from affliction, for a sense of divine favour?" And are you not told that "it is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God!" and that "blessed are all they that wait for him!" The order of nature is not to reap as soon as the seed is sown. Weeks and months of varied weather, and some of them dreary and chilling, are introductory and preparatory to the harvest. It is the same with the order of grace—Be ye also patient.

God doth all things well. If he led them the longest way, it was the right way. He did not choose it arbitrarily, but for reasons founded in his wisdom and kindness. Some of these reasons are not mentioned, but they were afterward developed; and the motive here assigned is well worthy of our attention —It was to keep them from "seeing war"—especially "with the Philistines;" into contact with whom they would have immediately come, the other way. At the present they were not fitted for serious conflict. Their spirits had been broken by oppression, and they partook of the timidity as well as meanness of slaves. They were raw recruits, shepherds, brick-makers. It was better for them not to fight for a while, or to have only a distant brush with Amalek, rather than be plunged at once into sanguinary contest with veteran foes inured to battle, and rendered courageous by victory. How instructive is this! What is the counterpart of it! He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. A bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench. He gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom. He affords to young converts some peculiar encouragements to allure them on, till they have advanced too far to think of going back, whatever they may meet

with. From a regard to their weakness and want of experience, for a time he hides or restrains many of their enemies, and thus secures them from encounters with which more aged Christians are familiar.

When will ministers and Christians learn to be followers of God? Under their guidance, persons who have but just left Egypt are often involved in disputes even with Philistines. They have scarcely entered the grammar-school of repentance before they are sent to the university of predestination. Babes, instead of being fed with milk, have strong meat given them, and even bones of controversy. Their hope is shaken, and their comfort destroyed, because they have not confidence and the full assurance of faith.

But if we turn to the conduct of our Lord, we shall see that every thing is not to be advanced at once—every thing is not to be exacted of all—and in all circumstances. Hear *him*. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now." "They said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." And he spake also a parable unto them: "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old: if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved."

JANUARY 13.

"*The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*"—Rom. ii. 4.

Repentance is indispensable to fallen creatures. And though it be from God, as well as all the blessings annexed to it, yet there is an order in his operations. He must do some things for us, before he can do others. He must give grace before he can give glory: and before he makes us happy with himself, he must make us holy like himself. Hence we read of "repentance unto life."

But let us observe the manner of his producing this repentance. We are *led to it by his goodness*—not driven by the terrors of the Almighty. Cain, Pharaoh, Judas, were all terrified into repentance: and there was nothing in their experience ingenuous or saving. Peter was led to repentance. He had sadly sinned, and denied his Lord with oaths and cursings. But the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and the look broke his heart; and "he went out, and wept bitterly." And says God, "Thou shalt remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done."

In the Gospel, he draws with the bands of a man and with the cords of love. And the repentance here spoken of, is the tender mother pulling her infant to her knee while chiding him, and constraining the little offender to hide his blushing face, and to sob out his heart into her bosom—not the stern father driving the transgressor from his face into distance, and concealment, and dislike, and falsehood. Or if it be the father, it is the father of the Prodigal. Impatient of paternal restraint, he asked for his portion of goods, and went away into a very far country. Soon all he had was spent; and there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want: and he went and hired himself to keep swine. And oft he looked at his grovelling charge, and said, "O that I was one of you, and could eat and die and be no more." He even fed upon their vile fare; for no man gave unto him. At length he came to himself; and the thought of home struck him—"There is bread enough in my father's house and to spare, and I here perish with hunger. I will arise and go unto my father." While he was yet a great way off, hovering about and afraid to draw nigh, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. He had prepared a confession, acknowledging the vilest guilt; and a petition, imploring the meanest favour; but forgiving, overflowing love prevented the expression of either. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring forth the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

He felt his unworthiness before; but he was a thousand times more penitent now. "What a father have I sinned against! What excellence have I contemned! What love have I abused!" How would he blush and weep, as he was not only clothed, but adorned; and not only fed, but feasted! How, as the ring touched his finger, and he was conducted into the room of mirth, prepared for *him!*—how, almost sinking under the weight of obligation—would he be ready to say—"How can I bear all this?" And would not the father be more endeared to him by forgiveness, than by relation? And after all this—would he be able to stab his father to the heart? To offend him? To grieve him? Must he not delight to obey him? and every moment ask, What wilt thou have me to do?

Despair hardens; but we are saved by hope. Threatenings may make us afraid to go on; but goodness makes us unwilling. Terrors may wrest the weapons of rebellion out of our hand; but goodness induces us to —hate them, and—throw them down—and weep over them—and return and vow—"O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name."

How mistaken then are many with regard to Christian repentance! It is not legal, but evangelical. It is not slavish, but filial. It is not degrading, but connected with the noblest feelings of the heart. It is not desponding and miserable, but lives in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. "And blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

JANUARY 14.

"*And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.*"—Gen. xl. 20.

If the chief butler had been falsely, and the chief baker had been justly accused, the providence of God was now seen in the clearing of the one, and the punishment of the other. If both were either equally innocent or guilty; here was an instance of the arbitrariness of a prince who probably prided himself in his absolute authority, and in having it said, "Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive." Or perhaps he designed to show his subjects that he would be known both in the exercise of mercy and judgment. And hence the *season* was his birthday.

The birthday of princes has been anciently and generally solemnized as a token of the respect due to their sovereignty: but it has often been abused, and given rise to wickedness and mischief. We see this in the case of Jeroboam. At the commemoration of his birth intemperance rioted; and the intoxication of the king himself injured his health, and made him forget his dignity in his joining familiarly with low buffoons and jesters: "In the day of our king, the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners." And how was it on a similar occasion with Herod? "Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates in Galilee"—the daughter of Herodias danced—the king was excited—and John was beheaded!

But in almost every rank of life, the usage prevails, of persons observing with some degree of festivity the day of their birth. The thing is lawful in itself if it be used lawfully. It might be used profitably. But our pious forefathers made it, if a day of relative intercourse and congratulation, yet a day also of pious feeling and regard. And surely it should be made

—A day of thanksgiving to the Author and Giver of life—For our being—for the rank we occupy in the scale of creation—for the country and family in which we were brought forth—for our civil and religious advantages —and for our preservation through so many perils—and when so many have been cut off.

—A day of humiliation—That we were shapen in iniquity, and in sin did our mother conceive us—that we went astray from the womb—that our transgressions are innumerable, and our trespass is gone up into the very heavens—and that we have not improved as we ought to have done, any of our privileges —"I do remember my faults this day."

—A day of reflection—That as there is a time to be born, so there is a time to die—that so much of life is already passed away as a shadow—that when a few years are come, we shall go the way whence we shall not return—that our continuance here is as uncertain as it is short—that we may never see this day again—and if we do not—where shall we be when it returns?

—A day of prayer—That we may so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom—that we may obtain pardoning mercy and renewing grace—that we may be prepared for all the duties and trials that lie before us—that whether we live we may live unto the Lord, or whether we die we may die unto the Lord; so that living and dying we may be the Lord's.

Happy they who without complaining of their lot, or being impatient to be gone, yet know the day of their death is better than the day of their birth. Though for them to live is Christ, to die is gain. Every returning birthday tells them, "So much nearer your heavenly home."

But how dreadful the state of those who know, and if they consider they must know —that every year advances them so much away from all they love; and brings them so much nearer a world in which as they have no hope, so after which they can have no desire. If conscience be not stupified, and all thought banished by company and gaiety—a birthday to them is far from enviable. Verses may be written; addresses may be received; smiles may be put on: but even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

What a difference in the two following references to the birth of the individuals—

"Who," says Voltaire, "can, without horror, consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders; it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is without pity pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water. In

man there is more wretchedness than in all the other animals put together. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys a transient good, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative: other animals have it not. He spends the transient moments of his existence in diffusing the miseries which he suffers: in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating and being cheated; in robbing and being robbed; in serving, that he might command; and in repenting of all he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble at the review of this dreadful picture to find that it contains a complaint against Providence itself; and I WISH I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN."

Now let us hear the language of the excellent Hallyburton, who died as he lived, full of confidence in God. "I shall shortly get a very different sight of God from what I have ever had, and shall be made meet to praise him for ever and ever. Oh! the thoughts of an incarnate Deity are sweet and ravishing. O how I wonder at myself that I do not love him more, and that I do not admire him more. What a wonder that I enjoy such composure under all my bodily pains, and in the view of death itself. What a mercy that having the use of my reason, I can declare his goodness to my soul. I long for his salvation; I bless his name I have found him, and die rejoicing in him. O blessed be God that I WAS BORN! O that I was where he is. I have a father and mother, and ten brothers and sisters, in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. Oh! there is a telling in this Providence, and I shall be telling it for ever! If there be such a *glory* in his conduct towards me now, what will it be to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne? Blessed be God that ever I WAS BORN."

JANUARY 15.

"*Unto thee, O Lord do I lift up my soul.*"
Psalm xxv. 1.

IT is not easy to do this. We are naturally sluggish and grovelling. Who has not reason to acknowledge with shame and sorrow, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust?" It is easy enough, in duty, to lift up our hands, and our eyes, and our voices; but it is another thing to come even to his seat, to enter into the secret of his tabernacle, and to hold intercourse with the God of heaven. And yet, without this, what is devotion? And how unanswerable will all our services be to the requisition of him who is a Spirit, and seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth?

And without this, a real Christian is no more satisfied than God. He will not, indeed, from a principal of duty, undervalue the means of grace, and neglect private and public devotion; but he is disappointed unless he can lift up his soul unto God.

And this marks the spiritual worshipper. He is not distinguished by always enjoying liberty and fervour in his holy exercises; but he mourns the want of them—while the formalist looks no further than the performance itself, and returns from the house and throne of God without ever inquiring whether he has had communion with him.

It is the spirituality of religion that befriends enjoyment. Nothing yields us pleasure but in proportion as the heart is engaged in the pursuit. How dull and how tiresome are those tasks, in which

> "In vain to heaven we lift our cries,
> And leave our souls behind."

But it is good to draw near to God. Then there is a sacred charm that keeps our thoughts from wandering. Then we attend on the Lord without distraction. Then we feel no weariness of spirit. We call the Sabbath a delight. We find his words, and eat them. And our meditation of him is sweet.

And when such a worshipper comes forth, he will be ready to say to all he meets, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." And *his* recommendations are likely to have some effect. For his profit will appear unto all men. His face shines. His heart speaks. His life speaks. His character speaks. He *must* be impressive and influential. He *will* be felt—in the family—in the Church—and in the world. He cannot but do good, even without pretension—without effort—

> "When such a man, familiar with the skies,
> Has filled his urn where those pure waters rise;
> And once more mingles with us, meaner things;
> 'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings—
> Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
> Which tells us whence his treasures are supplied.'

JANUARY 16.

"*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*"—Jer. xxix. 11.

WHAT can the people of God desire more? They are here assured by himself—that he *thinks* of them—that he *knows* his thoughts towards them—that they are *kind* in their nature: thoughts of *peace*, and not of *evil*—and that they regard an *end* allowing and requiring *expectation:* to bring them to an *expected end.*

He designed and procured the Jews good in Babylon: but the ransomed of the Lord

were to return and come to Zion. "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Here we see what was *their* expected end. And what did it prefigure, but "The end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls."—"The end, everlasting life?" The Christian is now on the sea, encountering many a wind, and feeling many a fear: but the voyage will end; and he will be brought into the desired haven. He is now on a journey; and he is often discouraged because of the way; but it will end in a better country, and at his Father's house, where are many mansions. He is now in a warfare; and though it be a good one, it is trying and painful: but the strife will soon end; and the head exchange the helmet for "the crown of glory that fadeth not away."

But what characterizes the posture of the believer's mind with regard to this end? Expectation. He is looking for that blessed hope. He is waiting for the Saviour from heaven. For he is now saved by hope. Every thing now leads him forward. Creatures; ordinances; his connexions; his experience; every thing in his painful, every thing in his pleasing feelings—all, all says, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." Human expectation is seldom justified by the event. If the votary do not miss his aim, he is disappointed in his object, and his heart sighs in the midst of his success. But let the Christian's expectation be as great as even the Scripture can make it, the blessedness itself will be much greater; and the fruition will induce the acknowledgment, "The half was not told me." Yet the expectation is very distinguishable from the confidence of the presumptuous. Natural men find it a very easy thing to hope, because they hope without any proper sense of their unworthiness and guilt; they hope without examination, without evidence; they hope uninformed and unauthorized. It is one of the first works of the Spirit of God to break up this state of mind; and then the man can say, with Paul, "I was alive with out the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Yet while he for ever shuts this door of hope, he opens another: he turns him from the Law to the Gospel; from self to the Saviour; from going about to establish his own righteousness, to embrace the righteousness which is of God.

Hence arises what the Apostle calls "*a good hope through grace*;" and the goodness consists not so much in the strength of the confidence, as in the solidity of the foundation, and the clearness and fulness of the warrant. Our Lord speaks of two builders; the one he calls a fool, the other a wise man. But the difference between them was not so much in the edifices themselves, as in the groundwork. Both structures looked fair enough to the passenger: but the house of the former was built upon the sand, and the storm carried it away; while that of the latter stood every assault, for it was founded on a rock. What a sandy base has the hope of many! How certainly and easily will it be overthrown—the expectation of the sinner, the worldling, the hypocrite, and the Pharisee! But the Christian's hope maketh not ashamed: it rests on the foundation laid in Zion; and the possessor cannot be confounded, unless God can become a liar, and be chargeable with perjury—for he has not only promised, but sworn: and "because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself."

Keep much alive this expectation. Let nothing shake its confidence. Let nothing obscure the object, or the ground of it. It can do wonders; and will produce a thousand advantages in proportion as it is realized.

I repair to the believer who is fully exemplifying it; and I find him dead to the world, and "all that earth calls good and great." And what is the cause? "An expected end." He has looked within the veil, and seen the glory that excelleth. The sun has rendered invisible the glow-worms—and the stars too.

I find him satisfied with an inferior condition in life, and though denied many indulgences with which the children of this generation abound. And what is the reason? "An expected end." They are at home, says he, but I am not.

> "Their hope and portion lies below;
> 'Tis all the happiness they know."

But I am a stranger and a pilgrim. I am at an inn; it yields me but few entertainments, or even accommodations—so much the better. It might otherwise tempt and detain me. It now urges me on.

And what makes him so cheerful in his trials? "An expected end." This hope, says he, I have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast: and "I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." This expected end also, says he, animates me in all the difficulties attending a course of obedience. If hope actuates to such exertions, hardships, and sacrifices, the sons of learning, fame, and wealth; should I ever be cold, or discouraged, with the certainty before me of an eternity, an infinity of all good!—This too, says he, composes me in the prospect, and reconciles me to the approach of death. In itself it is far from being pleasant; but it is the right way to a city of habitation, a departure to be with Christ which is far better. He also can make the exit as gentle as the issue is glorious. However this may be,

> 'Tis there for ever I shall dwell,
> With Jesus in the realms of day;
> Then I shall bid these fears farewell,
> And He will wipe my tears away.

" Jesus, on thee our hope depends,
To lead us on to thine abode ;
Assured our home will make amends
For all our toil upon the road."

JANUARY 17.

"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."—Gal. iii. 24.

What law? Three kinds of law were given to the Jews. It is not necessary to exclude either, though the last is principally intended.

The *judicial.* This regarded their policy as a nation; regulated their conduct towards each other; and determined their civil crimes and penalties. Even this led to Christ; especially the right of redemption, which lay with the nearest of kin. So did also the provision of the cities of refuge—and happy they who have fled for shelter and relief to him that was prefigured by them.

The *ceremonial.* This prescribed their worship, and enjoined a multitude of services and sacrifices which were all shadows of good things to come, but the body was Christ. It would be endless to particularize. The tabernacle, the mercy-seat, the altar, the table of shewbread, the paschal lamb—all these led to him, and derived their importance from the relation. And hence those who deny their typical use have always spoken depreciatingly of them. The Jews were in the infancy of the Church; and these ceremonies were like pictures placed over the child's lessons: or the whole economy may be considered as a star to the travellers in search of the Consolation of Israel, going before them till it stood over were the young child was—and then disappearing.

The *moral.* This was of universal and perpetual obligation; being founded not on any positive appointment or authority; but in the nature of man; and the relations subsisting between him and God, and between him and his fellow-creatures. The substance of it is, to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Is this unreasonable? Can God himself dispense with it? Can he require less?

Now this leads us to Christ,—First, by convincing us of sin: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. It is owing to men's ignorance of this law that they think so well of themselves. Did they know that it ranks all omissions of duty in the number of sins; that it extends to the state of the heart, as well as of the life; and to our motives and principles as well as our actions; self-abased and despairing, they would be constrained to cry out, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Secondly, by showing us our danger. This results from transgression; for the curse enters with all sin—"cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." If you were in a room where there was a dead lion, you would not be afraid. But if while you were walking by, he should come to life, and rise upon his feet, and glare his eyeballs, and begin to roar;—as he revived, you would die with fear.—So it was with Paul—"I was alive," says he, "without the law: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

Thirdly, by gendering despair of life by it. Here again the Apostle tells us, that his death *to* the law was also *by* it. "I *through* the law am dead unto the law, that I might live unto God." Thus the extremity of the danger makes us call out for a deliverer. Famine lectured back the Prodigal to his father's house. Disease drives the patient to apply to a physician, which he would otherwise neglect, and to submit to a remedy which he would otherwise reject.—"The law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."

The law, therefore, is good if it be used lawfully; and ministers ought to preach it. Some pass under a greater law work than others; but let none question the genuineness of the relief they have obtained from Christ, because they have not experienced much terror and distress. This terror and distress are but in the order of means; and the design of them is answered if we are brought to Christ, and acquiesce in *his* salvation.

—Every one therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto HIM, and can find encouragement nowhere else.—And him that cometh unto me, says the Saviour, I will in no wise cast out.

JANUARY 18.

"I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed."—Gen xlviii. 11.

This was the language of the dying Jacob, when Joseph presented to him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

We behold in it his *piety.* He owns God in his indulgences—*He* has shown me. Our comforts are sanctified and rendered doubly sweet when we receive them all from *his* hand. Let others live without God with them in the world; I would acknowledge him in all my ways. Let them ascribe their successes and enjoyments to chance, or to the power of their friends, or to their own diligence and skill; I would give him the glory that is due only to *his* Name. I would remember that whatever be the medium of my comfort, he is the source; that whatever be the instrument, he is the author,—"The

blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

Observe also his *surprise:* his expectation was more than exceeded. We remember the sad relation of the loss of Joseph, and the garment dipped in blood, by which his grief was deluded, though not relieved. "He knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him." For many years he never dreamed of his survival: but added, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and will ye take Benjamin away? all these things are against me." In process of time, however, all this gloomy conclusion was contradicted: "They told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." By-and-by this was fulfilled, "and Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

Something, however, was still wanting. Joseph had sons; and these would be peculiarly endeared to Jacob. At length he embraces *them*, as well as the father—"I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath showed me also thy *seed*."

Is this the only instance in which God has not only frustrated the fears, but surpassed the hopes of his people? When Moses was in the ark of bulrushes, all his parents could have hoped for would have been his preservation, or falling into the hands of some kind individual, who affected with his infancy and suffering would have taken care of him—though they should never have seen him more. But Pharaoh's daughter finds him; and adopts him; and his mother becomes his nurse; and he is educated in all the learning of Egypt; and he appears the deliverer and leader of Israel! David said, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul: but after a number of hairbreadth escapes, he was saved from *all* his enemies, and sat down upon the throne, "a wonder unto many."

What numbers are there in whose experience this remark has been exemplified as to temporal things! They once had no inheritance, no not so much as to set their foot on: all they hoped to gain by their humble efforts, was only bread to eat and raiment to put on: and, lo! he has given them not only subsistence, but competency and affluence. And as to spiritual things—the penitent remembers how, when awakened out of his sleep, and he gazed on the horrors of his state, there seemed nothing left but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation. How hard did he find it to hope even for deliverance! But the Lord appeared, to his joy; and not only spared and pardoned him, but enriched and ennobled him: and took him not only into his service, but into his house and into his bosom.

But in nothing has this observation been more frequently verified than in the last experience of believers. They had all their lifetime been subject to bondage through fear of death; a thousand comforts had been embittered by the apprehension. But this did not affect their safety then; and when their departure was at hand, they were filled with peace and joy; and had an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the Saviour's everlasting kingdom. Some who had trembled at the shaking of a leaf before, have then displayed a courage amounting to more than heroism; and those who had shrunk back from speaking, especially concerning themselves, have shouted aloud upon their beds and sung of his righteousness. "Ah!" says Dr. Goodwin, "is this dying! How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!" To die is gain.

When the Queen of Sheba, though accustomed to royal magnificence, witnessed the glory of Solomon, she exclaimed, The half was not told me. So the believer, after all the reports of the Scripture; all the earnests and foretastes of heaven; finds it to be a glory yet to be revealed: and when he arrives at the possession, he will acknowledge that eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.

Let all this scatter our doubts, and lead us to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him.' Especially let us view, through the force of this truth, all our future duties and difficulties. We are not to limit the Holy One of Israel. What is impossible to us is easy to him. His thoughts and ways are as far above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth; and he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. We have read of an Emperor who said, he delighted to undertake enterprises deemed by his counsellors and captains impracticable: and he seldom failed in them. God cannot

fail. But he loves to surprise. He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. At eventide, says he, it shall be light.

JANUARY 19.

"*And Noah walked with God.*"—Gen. vi. 9.

The Apostle gives us a fine representation of religion, when, speaking of God, he says, "With whom we have to do." We have to do with our fellow-creatures in various relations; but morality must be supported by piety and flow from it. It is with God we have principally to do. Our connexions with him, our expectations from him, our obligations to him, are all supreme.

Three expressions are observable as to our walking, with regard to God.

First, we read of "walking *after* the Lord." This supposes him to be our leader and example: and requires us to be followers of him as dear children. "They shall walk after the Lord," says Hosea.

Secondly, we read of walking *before* God. This supposes him to be our observer and witness—we are thus always in his sight. "Walk before me," said God to Abraham. "I will walk before the Lord," says David, "in the land of the living."

We also read of "walking *with* God." So did Noah. So did Enoch. So does every partaker of divine grace. This seems to hold him forth as our companion and friend. This is surprising: but so it is. There is an intercourse between us—we have fellowship one with another. In order to this, reconciliation is necessary: for "how can two walk together except they be agreed?" And this reconciliation must be mutual. It is not enough that God is reconciled to us through the blood of the Cross—we must be also reconciled to God, and love his presence, and choose his way.

For walking *with* God implies a oneness of course; and supposes that we advance together towards the same end. God's aim is his own glory: and we are enjoined, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God." As far as we observe this rule, we walk with God; as far as we neglect it, we leave God, and go in another direction.

If we are familiar and conversant with any one, we unavoidably catch something of his spirit and his manners—Hence it is said, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." If I walk with God, I shall resemble him; and all will take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus.

How envied would the man be that was allowed to walk with the king—But I walk with the King of kings and the Lord of lords—"Such honour have all his saints." What security have I in nearness to Him!—"He is at my right hand: I shall not be moved." What can I want if I have Him?—"My presence shall go with thee; and I will give thee rest."—

> "Were I in heaven without my God,
> 'Twould be no joy to me;
> And while this earth is my abode,
> I long for none but Thee."

JANUARY 20.

"*And praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him.*"—Luke iii. 21, 22.

We may consider this descent three ways: as an answer to prayer; as a miraculous testimony; and as a significant emblem.

—He had just been baptized: and was now going to enter on his public office; and we are told he prayed. Whether he prayed vocally or only mentally, we know not: but he prayed really. And if prayer was necessary for Him, can it be needless for us? And he prayed exemplarily; and has taught us, like himself, to pray after we have been engaged in any ordinance, and before we enter on any undertaking. Nor did he pray in vain. Indeed the Father heard him always, because he always prayed according to the will of God. And now prompt was the answer! It reached him in the very act of devotion: "And *praying*, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him." It was the same in the Transfiguration: "*As* he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." The prayer of faith is always immediately heard, and if it be not always immediately answered, it is not from a want of disposition in God to bless us, but because he is a God of judgment, and waits to be gracious. But if we consult the Scripture; and appeal to our own experience; and especially observe, not only the benefit we have derived *from* prayer, but *in* it; we shall know that he is a God at hand and not afar off: and verify the truth of his own word; "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

It is to be viewed also as a miracle; and so it was an authentication of his divine mission. Hence the voice that accompanied it—"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Hence John was previously informed of this confirmation. For though his relation, yet, to preclude all collusion and management, John had not seen Jesus before this event; but was taught, when they met, to recognize him by it: "John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to bap-

tize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." John, therefore, could not but be instantly and perfectly convinced: "And I saw," says he, "and bare record that this is the Son of God." Nothing, therefore, could have been more unsuspicious and decisive—The sign was foretold—its brilliancy, form, and descent were obvious to sense—it remained on him for a considerable time—and all was in the presence of a multitude of spectators! How different are the miracles of the Gospel from the prodigies of Heathenism and the lying wonders of the Church of Rome.

In whatever visible form the Holy Ghost had alighted upon the Saviour's head, the miracle would have been the same. But the symbol would not have been the same. His descending in "a bodily shape *like a dove*," was intended to be an emblem. First, an emblem of the dispensation he had to announce. The Law is called a fiery law; and it worketh wrath to every transgressor. The nature of it was intimated even in the very manner of its promulgation. The mount shook, and burned with fire. There were blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words. The people could not endure that which was commanded. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And how! The moment he is inaugurated, and is stepping forth to preach the kingdom of heaven, the heaven opens—not for the thunder to roll and the lightnings to flash, but for the Holy Ghost to descend in a bodily shape like a dove upon him!

Did the dove return into the ark with an olive branch, thereby announcing that the flood had subsided! And has he, with a leaf in his mouth, ever since been viewed as the image of a messenger of peace! Who came and attested deliverance from the wrath to come? Who came and preached peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh? What says the Church! "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." But who was the harbinger of another spring; of a nobler renovation!—Who cries, "Come, for all things are now ready!"

Secondly, an emblem of his personal character. All the love, tenderness, gentleness, mildness, for which the dove seems always to have been considered as a kind of representative, were to be found in him. So the prophecies going before had described him. And if we observe his miracles, if we enter into his life, his whole life on earth, we shall see him going about doing good. How kind to friends! How merciful to the distressed! How gracious to the guilty! How ready to forgive! How patient under provocation! He was compassion alive and embodied.

Thirdly, an emblem of the temper of his disciples. For there must be a conformity between him and them. In all things he has the pre-eminence; but if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. He that is joined to the Lord is of one spirit—and how did the Holy Ghost descend upon him? As a *dove*.

Estimate, therefore, your religion by your resemblance of this image. Do not judge of your having the Spirit, by opinions, but principles; by impressions, but dispositions; by gifts, but grace. Some fear they are strangers to the Spirit because they have not received it in a particular way: that is, after great terror and anguish of soul. This is, indeed, sometimes the case; but it is not always so. In this manner the Jailer's religion commenced: but it was not thus with Cornelius, nor with Lydia.

Whatever distress or horror of conviction we have felt, they are nothing if they have not brought us to Christ; and if we *have* been brought, let us be thankful, and rejoice, "if by any means." The best thing is, to judge, not by the manner of the operation, but the influence itself, and its effects: or by the fruit of the Spirit—And "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:—against such there is no law." "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

JANUARY 21.

"*The Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.*"—Num. xxvii. 12, 13

Reflections on death can never be unseasonable while we are in a dying world, and a dying church; and are conscious that we ourselves are dying creatures.

It is said God sees no iniquity in his people. But he has threatened to visit their transgressions with a rod. Some tell us that sin never hurts a believer. But it injured David. It degraded Eli. Moses was also severely chastised. He was very dear to God, and could plead great provocation; but because he rebelled against his commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, he was excluded the land of Canaan: and though he was very importunate, he could not obtain a repeal of the trying sen

tence. Yet in judgment God remembers mercy. He here orders him to die. But the order is attended with three softenings to reconcile him to it.

First. He must die—but he shall previously go up, and "see the land which the Lord has given to the children of Israel."—Some might suppose that this would tantalize him, and add to his affliction at the loss. But it was designed as an alleviation; and it was accepted by Moses as a favour. For this purpose, his natural sight continued uninjured: and his extent of vision was perhaps also enlarged. Thus not only was his curiosity gratified, but he saw, with gladness and praise, the goodness and truth of God's promise to his people. He also, in type, saw and hailed the prospect of a better country, even a heavenly; and which he was going to enter. "Oh!" say many, apprehensive now of the solemn event,

> "Oh! could we make our doubts remove,
> These gloomy doubts that rise,
> And view the Canaan that we love,
> With unbeclouded eyes!
>
> "Could *we* but climb were *Moses* stood,
> And view the landscape o'er!
> Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
> Should fright us from the shore."

And they are generally indulged. And of ten those have been peculiarly favoured, who all their lifetime have been subject to bondage through fear of death.

Secondly. He must die—but this will be "a gathering unto his people." To Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and the Israel of God. These he so prized on earth, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Some had departed that he had known: and numbers that he had not known:—but he was to join them—not in the same grave; for he was buried alone, and no one knows of his sepulchre unto this day; but in heaven—not as to his body, but as to his soul, which was to be united with the spirits of just men made perfect. The believer expects a family meeting. There, says he,—

> "There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
> There God my Saviour reigns."

Thirdly. He must die—but "only as Aaron his brother was gathered." And are we better than those who have gone before us? And is there any reason why we should be exempted from their lot? The previous removal of the pious, especially those of our own relations, tends to render death more familiar. It comes near enough for us to view it. It enters our very apartments. It also tends to diminish our forebodings and despondency. We have seen that God was better to them than their fears. He was with them in the Valley. Their end was peace. They were supported; they were comforted. And *we* thank God, and take courage. Why should it not be so with us? It also weakens our attachment to life. We have fewer detentions below, and so many more attractions above. Who has not felt the sentiment, "Let us also go away, that we may die with him?"

Surely the bitterness of death is past.

> "I could renounce my all below,
> If my Creator bid;
> And run, if I were called to go,
> And die as Moses did."

JANUARY 22.

"*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*"—Luke xxiv. 32.

That is—we have *now* discovered him. How is it that we did not discover him earlier? and find him out upon the road? Why did we not distinguish him by his very speaking—the manner of it—the effect of it—in touching and animating the heart?

Ah! my soul, it is thus his teaching is to be known—it is always felt. And while other teachers reach only the ear, he penetrates the heart; and causes it to burn with ingenuous shame, with abhorrence of sin, with holy revenge, with love to his name, with zeal for his glory, with earnestness to save sinners.

He *now* converses with us by the way, and he opens to us the Scriptures; and he does it in three ways.

First, by his dispensations. As the word explains Providence, so Providence illustrates the word. How many passages are there in the Bible, the beauty of which we should never have seen, the sweetness of which we should never have tasted, the force of which we should never have felt, had it not been for certain events, and those chiefly of an afflictive kind. These drive us to the Book, never so valued as in the day of trouble, and enable us to read with other eyes and feelings than before.

Secondly, by the labours of his servants. He replenishes his ministers, that they may dispense to others; he gives them the tongue of the learned, that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. It was in the temple David wished to inquire. It was, when he went into the sanctuary of God that he seized a clew which enabled him to unravel a mystery which had so confounded and distressed him before. And while hearing the word preached, have not *our* doubts been often solved, our fears dispelled, our faith and hope strengthened? That which was general before, has been particularized: that which was distant, has been brought home to our apprehensions: that which was read without impression or notice, has become significant and interesting. How often has the Angel of the Church, like Hagar's angel, opened our eyes, and shown us the well!

Thirdly, by the agency of his Holy Spirit. "He shall lead you into all truth." Means do not render his influence needless; revelation itself does not. David had the word of God; but he kneeled and prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." The dial tells us the time, but the sun must shine upon it. The compass enables the mariner to steer, but not if it be placed in the dark. "In thy light we shall see light." Here is the promise, at once to direct and encourage—"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." What is the reason why many, in the greatness of their folly, for ever go astray? They do not trust in the Lord with all their heart, but lean to their own understandings. But the wayfaring man, though a fool, errs not, because, made sensible of his ignorance and insufficiency, he in all his ways acknowledges God, and God himself directs his paths; and is his guide even unto death.

JANUARY 23.

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."
Luke xi. 9.

It is needless to prove, that by this action our Saviour intends prayer. But see the simplicity and familiarity of *his* comparisons; and wonder not that the common people heard him gladly. Volumes have been written upon the subject of prayer: but he who spake as never man spake, comprises every thing in one word—*knock*. The allusion is to a person who wishes to excite attention, in order to obtain relief—he knocks.

Where are we to knock? "I am," says the Saviour, "the door." "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

When are we to knock? "Evening, and morning, and at noon," says David, "will I pray, and cry aloud." "Pray without ceasing," says Paul. And says our Lord, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

For *what* are we to knock? We may in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make known our requests unto God. But we are supremely to implore all spiritual blessings, because these are blessings for the soul and eternity. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

How are we to knock? *Importunately*—we cannot knock too loud. Prayer is nothing unless it be sincere and earnest. God will not regard the address we ourselves do not feel. Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me:" and he prevailed.—How? *Perseveringly*. The Lord does not always immediately appear to our joy. "I waited patiently for the Lord," says David: "and" at last "he inclined his ear unto me, and heard my cry." And, "blessed," it is said, "are all they that wait for Him." But though it be a good thing for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God; it is often no easy thing. The delay is trying in itself; but circumstances may render it more so. While standing at the door, the weather may be foul; or those passing by may laugh and insult—for they are full, and have need of nothing: or the applicant may be weak, and ready to faint. And what, while *thus* exercised, can *keep* him knocking and waiting? Nothing but a sense of his wants. They are so pressing, that he *must* succeed, or perish. Nothing, but hope. This hope may be sometimes very weak. But a degree of it, if it only amounts to a mere possibility, is necessary to preserve him from abandoning his suit, and saying, "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" More, however, is desirable and attainable: and here is enough to say to him, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Here is the *command*—"Knock." Here is the *promise*—"It shall be opened."

But how shall I plead? I knock, and long for audience—and yet I draw back, and seem afraid to be seen. For what can I say? What does the BEGGAR say? He is not at a loss. He knows a fine address is not necessary—it would be contemned. Yet he can express his meaning: and his wants and feelings make him eloquent. Begin, then, and say—

> "Encourag'd by thy word
> Of promise to the poor,
> Behold, a beggar, Lord,
> Waits at thy mercy's door!
> No hand, no heart, O Lord, but thine,
> Can help or pity wants like mine"

Yet add—

> "The beggar's usual plea,
> Relief from men to gain,
> I know thou wouldst disdain:
> And pleas which move thy gracious ear
> Are such as men would scorn to hear."

There are five of these pleas urged by others, which *you* must completely reverse.

How often does the beggar plead his former condition—"He has seen better days: and once had a sufficiency for himself and others." But *this* must be your language—

> "I have no right to say,
> That though I now am poor,
> Yet once there was a day
> When I possessed more:
> Thou knowest that from my very birth
> I've been the poorest wretch on earth"

How often does the beggar plead his innocency or goodness—"I have been reduced, not by my fault, but by misfortune; and deserve pity rather than censure." But *your* language must be—

"Nor can I dare profess,
As beggars often do,
Though great is my distress,
My faults have been but few;
If thou shouldst leave my soul to starve,
It would be what I well deserve."

How often does the beggar plead the unusualness of his application—"This is not my practice: it is the first, and shall be the last time of my importuning you." But *your* language must be—

"'Twere folly to pretend
I never begg'd before;
Or if thou now befriend,
I 'll trouble thee no more:
Thou often hast reliev'd my pain,
And often I must come again."

How often does the beggar plead the smallness of the boon—"A very little will suffice me: I ask only a trifle." But *your* language must be—

"Though crumbs are much too good
For such a dog as I,
No less than children's food
My soul can satisfy.
O do not frown and bid me go,
I must have all thou canst bestow."

Men, so limited are their resources, are afraid of more applications than they can relieve; and, therefore, enjoin the petitioner secrecy; and he promises concealment. But *your* language must be—

"Nor can I willing be
Thy bounty to conceal
From others, who, like me,
Their wants and hunger feel:
I 'll tell them of thy mercy's store,
And try to send a thousand more."

And he will be delighted with this. He commands you to spread his goodness, and to invite all the ends of the earth!!

"Thy thoughts, thou Only Wise!
Our thoughts and ways transcend,
Far as the arched skies
Above the earth extend:
Such pleas as mine men would not hear,
But God receives a beggar's prayer."

JANUARY 24.

"*Thy blessing is upon thy people.*"
Psalm iii. 8.

—He has a people: and we need not ascend into heaven and examine the decrees of God to know who they are. The Bible is our book of life; there the heirs of glory are written, if not by name, yet by character; and "we are the circumcision," says the Apostle, "who worship God in the Spirit—and rejoice in Christ Jesus—and have no confidence in the flesh."

By the Scripture, therefore, let us judge ourselves; and be anxious to ascertain whether *we* are in the number of his people—for they are the most important and enviable people upon earth. They are not commonly distinguished by any worldly greatness; and they have many enemies who consult their injury—But the blessing of God is upon them.

—Upon their *mercies*. This takes the curse out of them, and gives them a relish never tasted in the comforts of others. "I will bless thy bread and thy water."

—Upon their *trials*. And they as much need a blessing upon their daily rod, as upon their daily bread. Without this, our afflictions will do us no good; yea, they will prove injurious; they will leave us more careless and impenitent. But by his blessing, they will turn to our salvation; and yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.

—Upon their *labours*. "Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." Without this, in vain we rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows: it is he that giveth his beloved sleep. It matters not what we sow, if he does not give the increase; or what we bring home, if he blows upon it; or what we gain, if we "put it into a bag with holes." "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

—Upon their *families*. The house of Obed-Edom was blessed for the sake of the ark; and the thing was publicly known. "I have been young," says David, "and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The generation of the upright shall be blessed.

—Upon their *souls*. Thus they are blessed with light, and liberty, and strength, and peace, and joy; yea, they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

O Christian! is this thy experience and portion! Rejoice and be grateful. What can equal the blessing of God?

But remember how it comes upon you. The source is his free and boundless grace. The medium is the Lord Jesus. He is the way from God to us, as well as the way from us to God!

Remember how it is insured—by the truth of his promise and his oath. You may therefore remind him of his engagement, and plead, as Jacob did, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good."

Remember also how it is to be enjoyed—in the use of means, and in obedience to his will. "Blessed are they that do judgment, and keep his commandments at all times."

O my soul, put in for a share. "Bless me, even me, also, O my Father." "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

JANUARY 25.

"And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed."—Gen. xlviii. 1, 2.

AFTER a very cloudy day, Jacob has a clear and calm evening. And it is but an evening. He is now called to go the way of all the earth: but his end is peace. Some die suddenly. But the more common road to the house appointed for all living is down the narrow, miry, dark, and dismal lane of sickness. The former is a privilege to the individual himself, as it saves him from "the pains, the groans, the dying strife:" but the latter befriends his usefulness more, by affording him opportunities to exercise the graces of the Holy Spirit, and showing how religion can sustain when every other supply fails, and refresh when every other spring of comfort is dried up. But we are not to choose for ourselves: and if we can hope that the Saviour will receive us to himself, we may well leave—the when—the where—and the how, to his wisdom and love.

When sickness seizes persons in early life, and removes them in the midst of their days and usefulness, we seem surprised. Yet wherefore? Are not all our days vanity? And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, is not their strength labour and sorrow? What then can we expect at one hundred and forty-seven?

Jacob had some time before kept his bed, and Joseph had visited him; but seeing no immediate danger of death, he had returned. Now the case assumes a more threatening character, and he is re-called. Doubtless they had sent to another Being, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." But they do well to inform Joseph; and Joseph immediately leaves his public affairs, and hastens to visit him. To visit the sick is a duty. If it affords the sufferer no effectual relief, it is soothing to show our regard, our sympathy, and our readiness to help. It is always profitable to ourselves; and far better than going to the house of mirth. For here the heart is made better; more serious and more soft. Hence the dying bed is shunned by infidel and worldly companions, who love not to be reminded how soon the condition of others may be their own.

How affecting is it to visit a fellow-creature, the progress of whose disorder is saying to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister. But to see a dear friend, a beloved relation, a revered parent, sinking under the decays of nature and the violence of disease! It is a sick dying *father*, who had trained him up under an affection too partial, that Joseph visits. Though death does not follow the order of nature, but the appointment of God; yet, while parents are living, there seems to be something between us and death; but when they are removed, his course seems open to us; and we naturally deem ourselves the next objects of assault.

Joseph goes not alone, but takes his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. It was wise and well in Joseph to take these youths away from the splendour of a court to see the end of all men; to view a dying bed dignified with more than a palace could bestow; to show them, at their entering the world, a servant of God departing from it; to enable them to receive his admonition and blessing; and to be reminded that though born in Egypt, Egypt was not to be their home; but while incorporated with strangers, they were to seek the heritage of Jacob, God's chosen.

How much wiser and better was this, than the conduct of many parents, who, instead of bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, conduct their children into scenes of gaiety and dissipation, exciting and feeding the pride of life, and making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. We mourn over children that are bereaved of their parents: yet we are sometimes tempted to wish the removal of some wretched fathers and mothers—hoping, that if these examples and teachers of evil were withdrawn, their children would find it good to bear the yoke in their youth, and that the Lord may take them up. The worst orphans are those who have wicked parents alive! What a dreadful meeting will there be hereafter between their offspring and those fathers and mothers who not only neglected their souls, but taught and encouraged them to go astray!

—Not that we would have children confined to religious prisons, or even cells. Hinder them not from seeing and enjoying whatever is pleasing and instructive in the world of nature, and the wonders of art. Keep them not in a frozen region, that shall chill and check every harmless budding of mind and affection. Let your piety itself be inviting, not rebuking and repulsive. But, O ye parents, keep them from infidel books; from vicious associates; from every path of the Destroyer. Allure them to the Bible, to the Throne of Grace, to the grave of friendship, to the chamber where a dying Jacob is waiting for God's salvation—to every place where they are likely to meet Him, who says, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

JANUARY 26.

He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."—2 Cor. v. 5.

THIS self-same thing is nothing less than the final blessedness of the righteous; which, though it doth not yet fully appear, is partially revealed, and expressed in the Scripture by various names and images. It is called in the preceding verses, "A building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" and also "life"—"Mortality shall be swallowed up of *life*."

With regard to this, the Apostle reminds us of God's work, in our preparation for the whole; and of God's gift, in our possession of a part.

The preparation is not natural to us. We are not born Christians, but made such: and the operation is no less than divine. Creatures have not done it; nor have we done it ourselves. It is above the power of education, example, and moral suasion—*He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.* But the work is as necessary as it is divine. In vain should we have a title to glory, without a meetness for it. Every office, every state, requires a qualification for it: and the higher the state and the office, the more important and difficult the qualification becomes. Happiness is not derivable from any thing, without a suitableness to it. It does not depend upon the excellency of the object, but the conformity of the disposition. The acquisition must be *wanted, desired, hoped for*, before it can gratify and content. Have I, then, any thing in me that could find happiness in the heaven of the Scriptures?

If He has wrought us for the whole, he has bestowed upon us a part—*He has given us also the earnest of the Spirit.* The earnest is not only to insure—it is a portion of the payment: and so is distinguishable from a pledge, which is returned at the completion of the agreement: for the earnest remains, and goes on as a part of the bargain. This is very instructive. It tells us that what the believer has here in the possession and influence of the Spirit, is not only indicative of heaven, but like it—and a degree of it.

Is heaven perfect knowledge? The eyes of his understanding are now opened: already he spiritually discerns; and in God's light sees light.

Is it perfect holiness? He is already delivered from the power and love of every sin; he is renewed in the spirit of his mind; he delights in the law of God after the inward man.

Is it perfect happiness? exceeding joy? fulness of joy? pleasures for evermore?—But even now, blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. There remaineth a rest for the people of God—but "we which have believed do enter into rest." They shall enter into peace—but now they have "a peace which passeth all understanding." They shall enter the joy of their Lord—but now, "believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." They will then join the spirits of just men made perfect—but the saints are now their companions and their delight. They will then dwell in his house and be still praising him—but they are already attempting and commencing this work: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Such experience it is that weans them from the world, and makes them willing to depart. Heaven is not a distant, unknown good. They are come to the city of the living God. They are partakers of the glory that shall be revealed—They *have* everlasting life.

JANUARY 27.

"*And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.*'
Isaiah xxxiii. 24.

WHO can say so here? How many of our fellow-creatures, the subjects of infirmity, languor, and nervous apprehension, are saying, "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day"—Another is "chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: his flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers." There are few—perhaps none—who never feel indisposition or sickness.

Sickness is the effect of sin, which brought death into the world, and all our woe. It now (under the providence of God, which is not only punitive, but salutary,) subserves various purposes. It is taken into covenant, so to speak, with the godly, and is one of the paths of the Lord, which are *to them all* mercy and truth. It checks them in going astray. It frees them from many a temptation, arising from more intercourse with the world. It gives them the most sensible proofs of the care, and kindness, and fidelity of their Lord and Saviour. He knows their frame, and has promised to be with them in trouble, and to comfort them on the bed of languishing; yea, to comfort them as one whom his mother comforteth; and she, while none of her children are neglected by her, will be sure to pay the most tender attentions to the poor little aching invalid.

Yet sickness is an evil in itself, and it is trying to flesh and blood. It not only deducts from the relish of all, and prevents entirely

the enjoyment of some, of our outward comforts; but it injures, it hinders, the performance of a thousand duties, relative, civil, and religious. It also often brings a gloom over the mind, and genders unworthy apprehensions of God, and misgivings of our spiritual condition. It not only shuts us out from the loveliness of nature, but from the public means of grace, and fills us with a mournful pleasure at the thought of seasons when we went in company to the house of God, with the voice of joy and gladness, to keep holy day. Hence Hezekiah, anxious to ascertain his recovery, asked, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" How feelingly has Watts described the Lord's prisoner, when the Sabbath comes.

"Lo! the sweet day of sacred rest returns:
..... But not to me returns
Rest with the day. Ten thousand hurrying thoughts
Bear me away tumultuous, far from heaven
And heavenly work: alas! flesh drags me down
From things celestial, and confines my sense
To present melodies. Unhappy state!
Where the poor spirit is subdued t' endure
Unholy idleness; and painful absence
From God and heav'n, and angels' blessed work;
And bound to bear the agonies and woes,
That sickly flesh and shatter'd nerves impose."

Well—soon the warfare with the body will be accomplished; and we shall put off the flesh and be in joy and felicity. And as there will be no more sin, neither will there be any more pain; for the former things are all passed away.

A union with the body, were it to rise as it now is, would be dreaded, rather than desirable. But the body will not only be raised, but improved: improved beyond all our present comprehension, but not beyond our present BELIEF. For we can trust Him who has assured us, that though it be sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power; though it be sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body. This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. We shall bear, not the image of the earthly, but of the heavenly. Our bodies will not be made like the body of Adam in Paradise, but like the Saviour's own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. No burdens, no depressions, then! No clogs, no confinements! No animal wants! No debasing appetites! No unruly passions! No fluttering heart! No aching head! "The inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick"—

"These lively hopes we owe
To Jesus' dying love:
We would adore his grace below,
And sing his power above."

JANUARY 28.

"*In the wilderness thou hast seen how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went.*"—Deut. i. 31.

THE image is parental. In another part of this book, the reference is to a parent *bird*: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him." Here the allusion is to a *human* parent; and it is worthy of remark, how often the allusion is made in the Scriptures. Thus to mention a few of them—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good gifts to them that ask him!" The softer sex is also adduced, and *maternal* tenderness supplies feeling as well as thought. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not I forget thee."

Observe the image which Moses here employs. It regards a child, a young child. It is too weak to go alone—it is borne. The father is here mentioned, not the mother: for the action of bearing requires strength, rather than tenderness. The mother may have been dead. When one parent is called to supply the place of both, an increase of care and kindness becomes necessary, and is soon felt. Imagine, therefore, an Israelite—deprived, in his journey through the wilderness, of the companion of his life—perhaps as soon as she had brought him forth a son—perhaps in consequence of it. The child, thus bereaved, is endeared by the decease of the mother, and *he* takes it, and bears it. How? Sometimes in his arms, and often in his bosom. How? Tenderly, softly,—now pressing it to his lips, now soothing its cries, now lulling it to repose—feeding it, defending it, supplying all its wants!

All this God does in reality, and infinitely more—What is the goodness, the gentleness, the care of the tenderest being on earth, compared with the disposition and kindness of God towards his people! When an image is applied to God, we must separate from it all its imperfections. A father may be unable to defend a child. He is sometimes absent from it. He cannot be always awake, and inspecting it. He may be ignorant of the cause of its complaint. He may not know what is good for it. He may decline in affection, and become heedless and negligent. He may become cruel, and abandon his charge. But nothing of all this can apply to Him, who bears us in all the way that we go.

Yea, we must not only strip the image of imperfection when we apply it to God—but we must attach to it divinity. Every human relation, however complete, is yet *finite* in its exercise and excellence: but His attributes are *infinite*. His love passeth know-

ledge. "He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

Well—hast thou *seen* in the wilderness, how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went? Let the sight affect your admiration, and induce you to exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" We talk of condescension: yet what is the difference between one creature and another; one worm and another—But what is God! What are we! how mean, unworthy, guilty!—Let it draw forth

Your gratitude; and call upon your soul, and all that is within you, to bless his holy Name. "To him that led his people in the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever."

—Let it encourage you.

You are not yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you; but he is with you in the way; and with you as your father; engaged to do all that such a relation requires. He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Reason from the past to the future, and, "because he has been your help, therefore under the shadow of his wings rejoice."—Let him be

Your example. Job was a *father* to the poor, not a tyrant, or an overseer. Be *kind*, as well as bountiful. Be ye followers of God. In him the fatherless findeth mercy: let him find it in you also. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful."—Recommend him to others, and say to them, "Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."—Oh that the young, who are entering this wilderness world, would place themselves under his care, and beseech him to be the guide of their youth.—Oh that the bereaved would think of Him, who can more than repair the losses which make them bleed. "When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up."

JANUARY 29.

"*And shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*"—John xvi. 32.

THERE is a relation between Christ and Christians, and a conformity founded upon it; so that what *He* says, *they* may subordinately adopt as their own language.

There are cases in which they *may* be alone—and there are cases in which they *ought* to be alone—and there is one case in which they *must* be alone: and yet they are not alone, because the Father is with them.

They *may* be alone, by the dispensations of Providence. By death, lover and friend may be put far from them, and their acquaintance into darkness; and bereavements may force from solitude the sigh, "I watch, and am as a sparrow upon the housetop." They have often been driven out of society by the wickedness of power. Their connexions have abandoned them through falseness, or deserted them through infirmity. And this is no inconsiderable trial. Our Saviour felt the desertion of his disciples; and said, "I looked for some to take pity, and there was none, and for comforter and found none; but looking upward, he said, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." Joseph was separated from his family and sold into Egypt, but the Lord was with Joseph. John was banished into the isle of Patmos; but there he had the visions of the Almighty, and was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. "At my first answer," says Paul, "no man stood by me, but all *men* forsook me; notwithstanding the *Lord* stood by me, and strengthened me." Yes; whoever dies, the Lord liveth. Whoever fails us, He is firm. "He is faithful that hath promised. He hath said, *I* will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

They *ought* to be alone, by voluntary solitude. Not that they are to become recluses, by abandoning their stations, and shunning intercourse with their fellow-creatures. The Christian life is a candle; but a candle is not to be placed under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house: and our light is to shine before men: and they are to see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. But *occasional* and *frequent* retirement for religious purposes, is a duty; and it will be found our privilege. We shall never be less alone than when alone. "Go forth," says God to Ezekiel, "into the field, and there will I talk with thee." Isaac, at eventide, was meditating in the field, when the Lord brought him Rebecca. Jacob was left alone, when he "obtained power with God," and with man, and prevailed. Nathanael was seen and encouraged under the fig-tree. Peter was by himself praying upon the housetop when he received the Divine manifestation. If the twelve Patriarchs, or the twelve Apostles, lived near us, and their presence drew us from our closets, their neighbourhood would be a serious injury to us. No creature can be a substitute for God. And it is *alone* we hold the freest and fullest communion with Him. It is there the secret of the Lord is with us, and he shows us his covenant. There we become acquainted with ourselves There we shake off the influences of the world. It is good to be there—

—Men may live in a crowd, but they *must* die alone. Friends and ministers can only accompany us to the entrance of the passage. None of them can speak from experience. And tell us what it is to die. And it is a way

we have not gone ourselves heretofore. But the Christian, though alone, is not alone even *here*. "Yea," says David, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *thou* art with me: *thy* rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

"Death is a melancholy day
To those that have no God."

But how must it be softened and cheered to those that have! Oh to have a God, the God of all grace, at hand, a very present help in the time of trouble; laying underneath his everlasting arms; shedding around the light of his countenance; communicating the joy of his salvation; and insuring the glory to be revealed—in ways beyond all our present experience and thought!

"O my God, what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

JANUARY 30.

"*And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*—Acts x. 7, 8.

Such was his obedience to the heavenly vision. It was immediate, and well executed. He did not himself go for Peter. This he would have readily done; but he was ordered by the angel to *send*. *His* presence was proper and necessary at home. He was a man in office: and in command. He had a weighty trust reposed in him: and we are to abide with God in our callings.

The messengers he employed were "two of his household servants"—which shows him to have been a man of some estate besides his profession: and a "devout soldier of them that waited on them continually." Observe here—the officer himself was a devout man, and he has not only devoted, but devout soldiers. The master was godly, and the servants are the same: for it is said, Cornelius feared God with all his house; like Joshua, who said, "As for me, *and* my house, we will serve the Lord." This correspondence between the head and the members of the family, may be accounted for two ways. First; such a man will choose, as far as he can, those that are religious to attend him—saying, with David, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within mine house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." And, secondly, he will be likely to render them such, if they are not such when he engages them. For he will be sure to use all the means in his power: and his own temper and example will harmonize with his efforts: and the grace of God, which he will never fail to implore, will honour him. Thus, they who are blessed, are also blessings, and for them the desert rejoices as the rose. Some are favoured by their opportunities and talents, to cultivate a large expanse of barrenness: but let us see, let us all see, whether we cannot convert a small spot at least, from waste, to smiling verdure: and cultivate, if not the neighbouring moor, yet a cottage garden; and let the traveller say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon thee." Many a domestic has been thankful that he ever entered a pious family: there he has been made wise unto salvation, and has become a child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. What a disgrace is it, for a Christian master and mistress to let a servant leave their family unable to read the Bible, or without a Bible to read!

"So, having declared these things to them, he sent them to Joppa." Here we have not a harsh injunction to a trembling slave; not a bare order, couched in a few unexplained terms; not the sealed instructions, the orders of a tyrant, who is to be implicitly obeyed, and is afraid to trust. Here is intercourse; openness. Here is confidence in the master, reposing on principle in the servants. How happy, where the distinctions of life are preserved—and they are to be preserved—and yet there is union and harmony; and condescension; and kindness; and unreserve, on the one side, and respect and obedience, without encroachment, on the other. How happy, where authority is softened by gentleness, and submission by love; where indulgence breeds nothing like irreverence, and goodness is rewarded by diligence and fidelity. And in what connexions, in what families, is all this most likely to be found? "Men do not gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles." Piety is the spring; the guard; the refinement; the glory of morality.

JANUARY 31.

"*And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet*" Exod. xv. 25.

It is useless to inquire what kind of tree this was, and whether the effect was produced by a quality inherent in the wood, or by a miraculous application. The latter is far the most likely. But it has been disputed, whether this transaction was designed to be an evangelical type. Perhaps it is impossible

to determine this—and it is unnecessary. We shall only derive from it an illustration of a very interesting subject, in which we are fully justified by the words of the Apostle to the suffering Hebrews: "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

We, like these Jews, are travelling through a wilderness. In our journey we meet with bitter waters. These are the troubles of life, personal and relative. These are very distasteful and offensive to flesh and blood. But they may be rendered drinkable. In other words, we may be able to endure the afflictions of life—yea, we may even acquiesce in them; and not only so, but glory in tribulation also.

—But how can this be done? Here is the secret—

"The cross on which the Saviour died,
And conquer'd for his saints;
This is the tree, by faith applied,
That sweetens all complaints.

Thousands have proved the bless'd effect:
Nor longer mourn their lot;
While on his sorrows they reflect;
Their own are all forgot.

"While they by faith behold the Cross,
Though many griefs they meet,
They draw a gain from every loss,
And find the bitter sweet."

Let us see how the Saviour's sufferings will alleviate ours. It is some relief in distress that others are exercised in the same way. Individuality of woe looks ominous—it is appalling to be singled out like a victim deer from the whole herd, and suffer alone. Thus the Apostle tells the Corinthians that no temptation had taken them but such as is common to man—and Peter also tells the sufferers he addressed, that the same afflictions were accomplished in their brethren that were in the world. So it is—whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. This has been the case with even his most eminent servants. And even his "dear Son," in whom his soul delighted—He, even he, did not escape. And shall we dread the fellowship of his sufferings!

But if there is something to affect the mind, even in the reality of his passion, there is much more in the greatness of it. In general, our groaning is heavier than our complaint; and we are prone, from our selfishness and ignorance, to imagine our trials pre-eminent. *He* could say, behold, and see if ever there were sorrows like unto my sorrow. In our sorrow we have alleviations. Ours are not perpetual; but his continued through life. Ours are not universal; but he suffered in every part that was capable of suffering—he was a man of sorrows.

Ours are not foreknown; but his were all laid out in prospect, and he suffered in apprehension, as well as reality. No tongue can express, or understanding conceive, what *he* bore when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground!

"Now let our pains be all forgot,
Our hearts no more repine;
Our sufferings are not worth a thought,
When, Lord, compared with thine."

We must also think of the dignity of this sufferer. We commonly and properly feel more for those who are reduced in life, than for those who have never enjoyed a better state, because the penury is embittered by previous affluence. Job considers his former greatness as an enhancement of his fall, and contrasts with the honours shown him in his prosperity, the insults now offered him by those whose fathers he would have set with the dogs of his flock. "They were children of fools; yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And now I am their song; yea, I am their by-word. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face." Jesus was the Lord of all; and all the angels of God worshipped him. Yet was *he* despised and rejected of men; he was buffeted, scourged, spit upon; and not only the Scribes and Elders, but the soldiers, the common rabble, and the very thieves, set him at nought, and vilified him. But who and what are we? Our foundation is in the dust. Man is a worm, and the son of man is a worm. It is condescension in God to have any thing to do with him, yea, even to chastise him. "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?"

But the great may render themselves *worthy* of their humiliations; and often have been *righteously* punished. We suffer justly, because we suffer the due reward of our deeds. Good men themselves cannot complain, or even wonder, at their afflictions, when they consider their years of irreligion, and their sins, since they have known God, or rather have been known of him—for who can understand his errors? In the sudden and awful death of his two sons, Aaron held his peace—he had just before been aiding to make the golden calf. David had been recently guilty of adultery and murder; when therefore Absalom, his own son, as well as subject, rose against him, what could he but say, of his offended God, Here I am, let him do to me what seemeth good unto him. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because, says the Church, I have sinned against him. But this man did nothing amiss. He was harmless, holy, separate from sinners. He could make the appeal to all his adversaries, Which of you convinceth me of sin? Yet he suffered—suffered, though *innocent*, and was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

His sufferings, therefore, were *for* us, only

and entirely *for* us—and what can be more relieving in our sorrows, than to consider the *benefits* we derive from his? Such is the benefit of an atoning Sacrifice; by which we are delivered from all condemnation, and have peace with God, and access to him. What are trials, when there is no wrath in them? when they are only the effects of a father's care! Then the bitterness of death is past. Such is the benefit of a sympathising Friend; who, from his own experience, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities —for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able also to succour them that are tempted. Such is the benefit of an Example; which shows us how to act and how to feel in the hour of trial—for he also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. Such is the benefit of Divine Influence; for by dying, he obtained for us the dispensation of the Spirit, which is therefore called his Spirit, and without the supply of which, we must fail and sink—but his grace is sufficient for us.

How encouraging, too, is it to remember the issue of his sufferings. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God. Our sorrows will also have an end—and the same end. It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.

FEBRUARY 1.

"*Do ye now believe?*"—John xvi. 31.

This was in reply to the profession of his disciples. They had said unto him, "Now speakest thou plainly. Now we are sure that thou knowest all things: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God."

It is not easy to lay the emphasis with perfect certainty; and yet, according as it is laid, the language will strike us with some shades of difference.

We may consider the words as an *inquiry*. "Do ye now *believe?* I have a right to ask, and I do ask." He is not inattentive to our condition, and our experience; our deficiences, and our improvements.—And though he needeth not that any should testify of man, because he knoweth what is in man; yet he will know these things from ourselves; that we may be urged to consider, and be affected with our own communications.

We may regard them as a *censure*. "Do ye *now* believe? You ought to have believed long ago; yet hitherto, it would seem, according to your own avowal, you have not —that is, as you ought to have done, and as you might have done. How strange and blamable, that, with all your advantages, you have been, even down to this hour, filled with hesitation and doubts." For he can reprove, as well as encourage. Do ye not yet remember? Do ye not yet understand? After his resurrection, he upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart.

We may consider them as a *check to presumption*. "*Do* ye now believe?" You think so; but have you not expressed yourselves with too much confidence? You now consider yourselves confirmed believers: and you suppose that you shall never err again; fail again. I know you better than you know yourselves. Imagination is not reality: and events will prove, that you have much less faith than you now suppose—"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone."

There is a difference between hypocrisy and instability. We may feel what we utter at the time: but emotions are not principles; impulses are not dispositions. There may be goodness: but it is like the morning cloud and early dew, that soon passeth away. How often do we become a wonder as well as a grief to ourselves! How little do we know of our own hearts, till we are tried. The little ants disappear in the cloudy and rainy day: and the observer might suppose they were all dead. But let the sun shine forth; and they are again all alive, and in motion. There is the same mud at the bottom of the water when calm; but the waves thereof cast up the mire and dirt.

Let us not therefore make too much of frames and feelings. Let us not imagine, because we are now walking in the light of God's countenance, that we shall never again mourn his absence. Behold, the hour cometh when we may consider all our present joy as only a delusion. Do we now believe? A change in the weather, a depression of animal spirits, may renew all our doubts and fears; and we may be all apprehension again.

Therefore let us rejoice with trembling. Let us remember our own weakness; and instead of depending on the grace that is in us, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

"Beware of Peter's word;
Nor confidently say,
I never *will* deny thee, Lord:
But, grant I never may.

"Man's wisdom is to seek
In God his strength alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
That trusted in his own."

FEBRUARY 2.

"*Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*"—Psalm lv. 6.

Whose exclamation is this? It is obviously the language of a man not at rest. And if

we read the preceding and following verses, we shall find that the complainant was, indeed, really in trouble. And so are many. It seems inseparable from humanity. Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.

But who was *this* man? One of those deemed the darlings of Providence: a man who had experienced one of the most marvellous revolutions recorded in history. For he was originally nothing more than a shepherd; but rose from obscurity, and became a hero, a renowned conqueror, a powerful monarch. God had given him the necks of his enemies and the hearts of his subjects; and we might have supposed him sated with victory, and glory, and dominion, and riches. But from the midst of all this he sighs, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." For, with all his aggrandizements, how much did he suffer from implacable malevolence! How much also from some of his own officers, and especially his nephew Joab, the commander-in-chief! After rearing his fine palace of cedar, he could not for a length of time take possession of it: for he was sick nigh unto death; and week after week saw the graves ready for him. And suppose they had then brought out his crown and imposed it upon him—would this have eased an aching head, or have relieved the anguish of a disordered body! What is an ornamented room in the rage of a fever? His own house also was not with God. What a distracted and wretched family! His daughter is humbled. The incestuous brother is murdered. The murderer becomes a traitor, and drives his father, as well as king, into exile. In his flight, he is told that Ahithophel, his bosom friend and counsellor, is among the conspirators with Absalom. Who can tell what other sorrows corroded him! The heart knoweth his own bitterness. There are griefs that we cannot pour even into the bosom of intimacy. There are thorns in the nest that pierce through the down that lines it, but are known and felt only by the occupier. Did David never regret the loss of the privacy of Bethlehem?

The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy. We are prone to think that, though *generally* men are born to trouble, there are some exempted individuals; and that though, commonly considered, this earth is a vale of tears, there are some privileged spots. And it is worthy our observation, that these exceptions always belong to *others*, and always to those who are *above* us. Is the servant happy? He will when he is master. Is the master happy? He will when he is rich. Is the rich man happy? He will when he is ennobled, and has distinction as well as gold. Is the nobleman happy? He will when he his king. Is the king—the king happy! "Oh," says *he*, "oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

Let us remember this, and not be afraid when one is made rich, and the glory of his house is increased. Let us check the risings of ambition, and not seek great things to ourselves. Let us learn in whatsoever state we are, to be content; and follow the moderation of the Patriarch, who asked only for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a safe return to his father's house in peace.

Felicity depends not upon external condition, but the state of the mind. Paul was happy in prison; Nero was miserable in a palace. Haman, after telling his wife and his friends all his promotion and glory, adds, Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. On that night could not the king sleep.

> "Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep—
> He, like the world his ready visit pays,
> Where fortune smiles"—

But is this true? Sleep, sound, wholesome, refreshing sleep, has least to do where fortune smiles. His ready visits are paid to the early rising, the temperate, the diligent: the sleep of a labouring man is sweet. "The wretched," indeed, "he forsakes." But where does he find them? Here is one of them—the ruler of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces—on that night could not the king sleep. Ahab, the monarch of Israel, is melancholy and sick, and cannot eat, because he cannot obtain Naboth's little parcel of ground for a garden of herbs; and neither his happiness or health could go on till his worthy helpmate taught him to gratify his wish by the destruction of the nobleminded peasant. How wise was the answer of the Shunamite, when Elisha offered to speak for her to the king—"I dwell among my own people." If we are not content with such things as we have, we shall never be satisfied with such things as we desire. If there is a difference in outward conditions, it lies against those who fill the higher ones. Their want of occupation—the listlessness, far worse than any labour, they feel—the little relish they have of natural refreshment—their sufferings from weak nerves and timid spirits—their squeamish anxieties about their health—the softening of their disposition by indulgence and ease, so that they are unable to endure—their sensibility under trifling vexations, which others despise—their leisure to brood over a progeny of dangers—the envies to which they are liable—their cares, fears, responsibilities and dependence—the unreasonable things expected from them, and their inability to give satisfaction to expectants—Where shall I end? These, and a thousand other things, should be enough to show the poor and the busy that those who are placed above them are taxed in the same proportion.

Neither, however, is the opposite state the most desirable. As far as happiness depends on any outward condition, there lies—be-

tween the extremes of prosperity and adversity, penury and affluence—the most eligible choice. If life be a pilgrimage, man the traveller, is best prepared for advancing, not when the shoe pinches, or when it is large and loose; but when it fits—not when he is destitute of a staff to lean upon, or when he has a large bundle of such articles to carry; but when he has one, which affords him assistance without incumbrance. Pray we therefore, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

FEBRUARY 3.

"*Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence.*"—Deut. xxiv. 18.

The bondage of Egypt, under Pharaoh's tyranny and task-masters, was nothing to the bondage of corruption, in which sinners are naturally held, and the power of darkness, from which we are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And the freedom the Jews obtained, when they were delivered by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, was not to be compared with the glorious liberty of the sons of God. If the Son makes us free, we are free indeed.

And this redemption is what we are called to remember. The admonition may seem needless. For can such a deliverance be ever forgotten? We should once have deemed it impossible; but we are prone to forget his works, and the wonders which he has shown us. The event indeed can never be forgotten completely. But we need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance. And for four purposes—We should remember that we were bondmen in the land of Egypt—but the Lord our God redeemed us thence.

First, for the purpose of humility. We are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think: but with the lowly is wisdom. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. And surely we have enough to hide pride from us, if we reflect properly. If we are now wise, we were once foolish; if we are now justified, we were once condemned; if we are now the sons of God, we were once the servants of sin. Let us look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged.

Secondly, we should remember it for the purpose of gratitude. We are affected with the kindnesses shown us by our fellow-creatures: yet they were under obligation to relieve us. We had not forfeited our lives to them. They did not deliver us from the lowest hell. They did not become poor to enrich us, and die that we may live. And shall we overlook our infinite Benefactor? We have no claims upon *Him*, for the least of all his mercies; and therefore should be thankful for *all* his benefits—But *herein* is love. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

Thirdly, we should remember it for the purpose of confidence. David argued from the past to the future; and said, Because thou hast been my help, therefore, under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. But here we have a peculiar reason for encouragement. For what were we when He first took knowledge of us? Was he not found of them that sought him not? The want of worthiness was not a bar to his goodness then—And will it be so now! Is there with him any variableness or shadow of turning? Is there not the same power in his arm, and the same love in his heart? Did he pardon me when a rebel, and will he cast me off now he has made me a friend! "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Fourthly, we should remember it for the purpose of pity and zeal. How many are there all around you, in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, ready to perish! You know the state they are in; and you know the blessedness of a deliverance from it. You are witnesses for God, and can tell of what he is able and willing to do. You can speak from experience. Invite, therefore, the prisoners of hope to turn to him. Say to the destitute, That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye may also have fellowship with us. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

FEBRUARY 4.

"*And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*"—Gen. xxxii. 9—12.

We cannot too much admire the conduct

of Jacob, on this trying occasion; when he had to meet his enraged brother Esau. The religion that, aiming at something uncommon and preternatural, disregards the plain dictates of reason and revelation, is always to be suspected. On the other hand, caution and exertion, unaccompanied with a devout dependence upon God, is the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with Him: and he will take the wise in their own craftiness. Therefore, prudence and piety should always be connected together. Accordingly, Jacob sends forward a deputation, with a soft answer that turneth away wrath; and arranges his company and cattle in the wisest order—But what does he *then?* When we have done all that we can do—to what does the whole amount? "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain:" and unless he gives his beloved sleep, "in vain we rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows." When we have planned, and are setting all our measures in motion, *then* is the time to take hold of God, and say, "O Lord, I beseech thee, send *now* prosperity." Jacob, therefore, now prays; and as this prayer was heard, and He who teaches us how to pray is our best friend, let us glance at the particulars which God has here noticed.

Observe the relation under which he addresses the Supreme Being. "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac." As much as to say, my family God; and my God in covenant. This was laying hold of his faithfulness, as well as goodness, and asking *in faith.* We have another title under which to bespeak attention—The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This inspires more abundant hope; and involves more exceeding great and precious promises. It reminds of a covenant made with *him*, and *so* with us, everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure.

He appeals to the will of God in his present difficulty. "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee"—I am now in a strait, but I have been brought into it by following thee. This was wise. They that suffer according to the will of God, may commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing. It affords great relief to the mind, and much aids our confidence, when we are conscious that the embarrassments we feel have not been brought upon ourselves, but have befallen us in the path of duty. And how does it add to the pressure of the burden, and the bitterness of the cup, when God asks, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" and conscience cries, "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?" Let no man, therefore, suffer as a murderer, as a thief, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. We complain of the world: and there are many unavoidable ills in life; but there is a large multitude of evils entirely of our own producing, and God is no otherwise accessary to them, than as he has, in the nature of things and the course of providence, established a connexion between folly and misery.

He shows his humility. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." This temper is not natural to us; but grace brings us down, and keeps us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We cannot have too much of this self-abasing disposition: it will restrain us from exercising ourselves in great matters, and in things too high for us; it will keep us from murmuring under our trials; it will teach us, in whatever state we are, therewith to be content; and it will dispose us in every thing to give thanks. Only in proportion as we are humble, can we be thankful.

Jacob, therefore, acknowledges the kindness of God towards him. More than twenty years before, he had crossed the same river where he now was. At that time he had no inheritance; no, not so much as to set his foot on. He was going forth, a poor pilgrim in search of subsistence; and all that he stipulated for was bread to eat, and raiment to put on; and a return to his father's house in peace. From this condition he had been raised to affluence; and his family and his flock had equally multiplied. Therefore, says he, "For with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands"—alluding to the division which he had just made of his household and his substance. We should do well often to review life; and to mark the changes which have taken place in our stations and circumstances. Have not many attained conditions, which would once have appeared the most improbable? Yet the Lord has made windows in heaven—and such things have been. Yet he has brought the blind by a way that they knew not; and made darkness light before them. Those born in the lap of ease, and whose course has been always even, cannot enter into the feelings of those who have found themselves advanced, without any designs formed by their friends, or expectations indulged by themselves. But how sad will it be, if they want the disposition of Jacob; and, forgetting that the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, sacrifice to their own net.

Observe his petition. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Here nature speaks; and we are allowed to feel, and even to desire the cup may pass from us, with submission to the will of God. How much was there here to awaken anxiety and dread! not only his own death,

but the destruction of each of his wives—and each a mother too—and of his children also—and of the mother *with* the children; or, as it is in the margin, the mother upon the children—So it would have been. On the approach of the executioner, she would have thrown herself upon them, to cover and defend them; and in vain would he have endeavoured to pull her away—she would have been slaughtered upon their bodies.

Finally, his argument. "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." He had mentioned this before—Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee: and now he repeats it. It was a sweet morsel, and he rolls it under his tongue. It was a breast of consolation, and he sucks till he is satisfied. It shows us that promises do not supersede prayer. If God has engaged to do a thing, it will indeed be accomplished, but in his own way; and he has ordained the means, as well as the end. The promises furnish us both with matter and encouragement when we pray: and we cannot do better than to repeat them, and to plead them with God. This, says an old writer, is suing God upon his own bond. "Remember thy word unto servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope."

FEBRUARY 5.

"That, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."—1 Thess. v. 10.

How well does the Apostle call the Redeemer "our life." There are three modes of expression by which our relation to him under this character is held forth: and they all furnish matter for the most important meditation. We are said to live *by* Him—"He that loveth me, even he, shall live *by* me." We are said to live *to* Him—"They that live, shall not live unto themselves, but *unto* Him that died for them, and rose again." And we are said to live *with* Him—"That, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together *with* him."

To judge of this state, we must consider where he lives; and how he lives: and what he is; and how far he is able, by his presence, to bless us, and make us happy. For though our happiness, with such a nature as ours, must be social, it is not a privilege to live with every one. With some it would be a misery to dwell even here: and to have our "portion with the hypocrites and unbelievers," and to be with "the devil and his angels," will be a dreadful part of future torment. But oh! to unite with those who will be all loveliness! To embrace, without any fear of separation, those who were endeared to us on earth! To sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God! To join the innumerable company of angels! But, above all, to live with Jesus! To be with him where he is, to behold his glory! To walk with him in white! To reign with him! For ever and ever!—This is far better.

The season for enjoying it is—"whether we wake," *i. e.* live; or "whether we sleep," *i. e.* die. It takes in, therefore, time and eternity; our living with him on earth and in heaven; in the communion of grace, and in the fellowship of glory. These are inseparably connected, and are essentially one and the same condition with regard to him; but they differ in degree, as the bud and the flower, the dawn and the day, the child and the man differ. His people live with him now, but not as they will live with him hereafter. Now he is invisible—then they will see him as he is. Now their intercourse with him is mediate, and often interrupted—then it will be immediate, and free from any annoyance. Now they are with him in the wilderness—then they will be with him in the land flowing with milk and honey. Now they groan, being burdened with infirmities, and cares and troubles—then they will be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. Yet, whether they *wake* or *sleep*, they live together with him.

And does not this more than indicate his divinity? How else can they live with him *now?* He is no more here, as to his bodily presence—for the heavens have received him. Yet, where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is in the midst of them. Yet he said, Lo! I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Yet, says the Apostle, We live with him even while we *wake!* At the same time, others live with him when they *sleep*—The dead are with him above, while the living are with him below! How? unless he pervades all periods? Unless he occupies all places? How? unless he can say, "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" It is obvious the Apostle viewed him as omnipresent; and could say "Whom have I in *heaven* but Thee? and there is none upon *earth* I desire besides Thee."

Here is your happiness, Christians. It is your union with Christ. This prepares you for all seasons, and all conditions. Do you think of life? This is sometimes discouraging, especially when you contemplate the prospect in a moment of gloom. But why should you be dismayed? If you *wake*, you will live together with him. If your continuance here be prolonged, you will not be alone. He will always be within your call He will render every duty practicable, every trial supportable, every event profitable. And therefore, whatever be your circumstances, you may boldly say, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me

with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."—Do you think of death? This is often distressing, and there is much in it to dismay—if viewed separate from him. But if you *sleep*, you will live together with him. Death, that severs every other bond, cannot touch the ligatures that unite you to him—As you leave others, you approach nearer to him—you get more perfectly into his presence—you are for ever with the Lord.

Voltaire more than once says, in his letters to Madame Duffand, "I hate life, and yet I am afraid to die." A Christian fears neither of these. He is willing to abide: and he is ready to go. Life is his. Death is his. Whether we wake or sleep, we shall live together with him.

FEBRUARY 6.

"*And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.*"—Luke xxiv. 13—15.

The name of the one, was Cleopas; of the other, we are ignorant. We are also unacquainted with the design of this journey—But it betrayed the imperfection of these disciples. For it is not asonishing, that they could leave Jerusalem *before* they had *ascertained* an event so interesting as his resurrection; especially as he had more than once assured them, that he should rise again the third day; and certain women, early at the sepulchre, had reported that the body was missing, and that they were informed by a vision of angels, that he was alive: and also some from among themselves had gone to the grave, and found it even as they had said!—Yet they walk off into the country in the midst of all this perplexity! Such is our impatience! Such is our fear! Such is our despondency!—But he that believeth maketh not haste.

Yet a drop *is* water, and a spark *is* fire: and a little grace *is* grace, and perfectly distinguishable from mere nature. And we have here not only infirmity, but excellency. Their minds cleave unto him still. They can talk about nothing else.

And he joins them in the way. Let me not pass over this without remark.

It shows the Saviour's kindness and tenderness. He does not despise the day of small things, nor cast off those who have a little strength. I know not what kind of person he had. But if he had not bodily beauty; in his mind, he was fairer than the children of men. I am sure of his temper—I can look into his heart—I see that it is made of love,—"A bruised reed will he not break; and the smoking flax will he not quench; but will bring forth judgment into victory."

It shows me the truth of the promise. "*Where*"—let it be where it will; in the temple, the private dwelling, the field, the road: "where *two* or three"—if there are no more; for as he is not confined to place, so neither to number—"are gathered together in my Name, *there* am I in the midst of them."

I also learn, that the way to have him for our companion, is to make him our theme. No theme ought to be so dear—no theme can be so excellent—so profitable.

Let worldly minds pursue the things of the world. But let Christians abundantly utter the memory of *his* great goodness; and mention the lovingkindness of the Lord. And then he will always be found of them.

"We'll talk of all he did and said,
And suffer'd for us here below;
The path he mark'd for us to tread,
And what he is doing for us now.

"Thus, as the moments pass away,
We'll love, and wonder, and adore;
And hasten on the glorious day
When we shall meet to part no more"

FEBRUARY 7.

"*Take up thy bed, and walk.*"—John v. 8.

We are too prone to overlook the circumstantial and incidental instruction of the sacred writers—forgetful that every word of God is pure; and that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. Let us not lose any of this hid treasure, for want of observing, and applying what we read.

Our Saviour met with this man at the pool of Bethesda; but no sooner had he pronounced the word of healing, than he orders him to take up *his bed*, and walk. He has always reasons for his conduct, though they are not always perceptible. But we can see four reasons for this command.

First, it was to evince the perfection of the cure. His walking, indeed, would prove this; but his taking up his bed, and being able to carry that in which he had been carried, would display it still more, as it showed his strength, as well as health. We often refer to miracles; and they are the witness of the Spirit. But the question is, were they true? Never could any thing have been more remote from imposition, than the miracles recorded in the Gospel. Examine them. They were many—they were public—they were performed before witnesses interested in their detection, had they been false. The circumstances, too, were always corroborative. Does he raise the dead? The young man was carried to his burial, attended with much peo-

ple. Lazarus was in his grave, and had been dead four days. Does he recover the infirm and the diseased? The man whose eyes he opened, was born blind. And this paralytic had been afflicted thirty-eight years; and in a moment he was made whole; and was seen by all going home with his bed upon his shoulders.

Secondly, it was to teach him to be careful, and to waste nothing. The bed probably was not very valuable, but he was not to throw it away. In correspondence with this, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, even then, when he had shown with what ease he could multiply resources, and support his creatures, he said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Christians should avoid closeness and meanness, lest their good be evil spoken of. But there is another extreme they should be anxious to avoid: it is profusion, negligence, carelessness. They ought not to love money; but they should know the use and worth of it; and remember that they are responsible for all they have. How needy are many: and how ready would they be to call down the blessing of Heaven upon you for a few mites; for the remnants of your wardrobe; for the refuse of your garden; for the crumbs that fall from your table! Be examples of economy yourselves. Teach your children to be prodigal of nothing. You would dismiss a servant that purloined; keep no one that wastes. How unfrugal often are the poor! How few of them seem to know how to make the most of any of their pittances! Let them be instructed personally and by tracts.

Thirdly, as a memento of his deliverance and duty. When at home, and looking on this bed, he would say—Ah! there I lay, a poor enfeebled creature; and said, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." It is a sad charge against Israel, that they *soon* forgot his works, and the wonders he had shown them. We are prone to the same evil; and need every assistance to aid recollection. Joseph and Moses made the very names of their children remembrancers. Samuel set up a stone, and called it Ebenezer. Some have set apart particular days. Some have kept diaries—

> "Why should the wonders he has wrought
> Be lost in silence, and forgot?"

Fourthly, to try his obedience. Carrying his bed was a servile work; and it was now the Sabbath, on which day no burden was to be borne. He seemed therefore to oppose the law of Moses; and accordingly the Pharisees were offended, and murmured. But works of necessity and mercy were *always* proper; and the Sabbath was made for man; and the Son of man was Lord even of the Sabbath-day.

And it is pleasing to find that the man's mind was informed, while his body was cured; and to hear him reasoning with the objectors as he does. "He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me Take up thy bed, and walk." How fine, how instructive is this!—We are not to judge the Lord's commands, but to follow them.—His orders may be trying, and in obeying them we may give offence: but we need not regard the revilings of men, while we can plead his authority.—It is our deliverer, our benefactor, who enjoins: and what has *He* said unto us? He that died for us, and saved us from the wrath to come—what will *He* have me to do? He that made me whole, the *same* says unto me, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

FEBRUARY 8.

"*And he was there in the prison.*"
Gen. xxxix. 20.

YET he was not there *criminally*; but under an imputation, as false as it was infamous. How little can we judge of character from outward condition! At one time, the best people in the country were to be found at the stake, or in prison. But it is the cause, and not the cross, that makes the martyr. Let us see, that, like Daniel, we are accused only in the law of our God: and resemble Paul, who suffered *as* an evil doer, even unto bonds, but *was* far from being one. Let us beware of drawing upon ourselves deserved reproach or persecution, by imprudent or immoral conduct: "What glory is it, if when ye are buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently?"

"And he was there in the prison"—But he was not *alone* there. The Lord was with Joseph—He hath said, "I will *never* leave thee nor forsake thee." No situation can exclude God from access to his people; or keep them from intercourse with God. Jeremiah found Him in the deep dungeon; John in the isle of Patmos; and Paul on the sea. His people sometimes wonder at this; the experience is beyond their expectation, and they say, with Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." Yet they might know it—especially if it be a scene of distress; for has he not said, "I will be with thee in trouble?"

"And he was there in the prison"—But he was not *miserable* there. All was peace within. His rejoicing was this, the testimony of his conscience. How much happier was he in this respect, than his vile mistress, who had knowingly belied him; and his brethren, who had cruelly sold him—how galled often would they be by reflection and self-reproach! How much happier was he, the suffering

slave, than Potiphar, his prosperous master—yea, than Pharaoh upon the throne! Strange as it may seem, this prisoner, in this wretched confinement, was by far the happiest man in Egypt. But he had the presence of God. This presence makes the fulness of joy above; and this presence here, turns a prison into a palace—into a temple. The world marvels to see how Christians are sustained and consoled in their afflictions; but the reason is, they cannot see all: they can see their burdens, but not the everlasting arms underneath them: they can see their sorrows, but not the comforts of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts—But they themselves know, that as the sufferings of Christ abound in them, the consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

"And he was there in prison"—But he was not there *in vain*. He was a witness for the God of Israel: and the very manner of his suffering; his temper; his carriage, if he had said nothing, would have impressed all that beheld him. But he would also speak a word in season; and his addresses, enforced by his example, would carry weight with them. He taught the master of the prison; and his fellow-sufferers; and explained the dreams of the chief baker and butler; and thus raised wonder, and gained confidence, which he failed not to turn to advantage.—There, also, he was himself at school; and gained much useful knowledge, while "the word of the Lord tried him." His tribulation wrought patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. In the prison he was prepared for the palace. By his adversity, he was made meet for prosperity. He could well say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

"And he was there in the prison"—But he was not there *always*. Nothing could detain him when the word of the Lord came, and commanded his deliverance. Till then, he relied on God's promise; but his confidence was sorely exercised: the event was not only delayed, but seemed to grow less probable, and the gloom thickened. But he found, that it is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. At length, and not a moment beyond his own appointed time, and not a moment beyond the best time, the Lord appeared; and from prison he steps into the second chariot in Egypt.

Christians, the God you serve is continually able to deliver you. If you have his word, lay hold of it; and let it keep your mind in perfect peace, being stayed on him. You have nothing to do with difficulties. Indeed there *are* none where the truth of God is concerned. You believe in God the Father *Almighty*, Maker of heaven and earth—*He* turneth the shadow of death into the morning. At evening time it shall be light.

FEBRUARY 9.

"*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.*" Psalm xxxiv. 2.

We are prone to boast; and there is scarcely any thing that does not often call forth the tendency. Some boast of their beauty—Some, of the multitude of their riches—Some, of their pedigree and rank—Some, of their genius, and learning, and knowledge. Some boast of their wickedness; which is glorying in their shame. Some boast of their goodness, when, too, they *have* none; for there is a generation who are pure in their own eyes, and are not washed from their filthiness. But they who have "the root of the matter" in them—Have *they* any right to boast? Is their religion derived from themselves? Is it self-sustained? Is it perfect? Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? The law of faith—for "it is of faith, that it might be of grace." And this is its language: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

But here we see, that we may glory in Him, though we are forbidden to glory in creatures, or in ourselves. Accordingly, David says, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." And so ought we to resolve. And there are moments and frames, when, surveying Him in his works, and perfections, and promises, the believer can exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory—

> "All my capacious powers can boast,
> In thee most richly meet;
> Nor to my eyes is light so dear,
> Nor friendship half so sweet."

"What a Friend have I! a tried, kind, almighty, everlasting Friend: a Friend who loveth at all times, and has sworn that he will never leave me nor forsake me—'This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.' What a Shepherd have I! The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." What a God is

mine! The God of truth; the God of all grace; a God in covenant; a God in Christ —This is my God for ever and ever: he will be my guide even unto death. What a portion is mine! "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

But not only is included here, the elevation of joyous feeling, arising from the view and possession of magnificent good; but also the breaking forth of gratitude and praise. The selfish and the proud dislike the thought of dependence, and wish every acquisition to be considered as of their own procuring:—"therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." But pious minds ever delight to own, that they have nothing but what they have received. It is very painful to be under obligations to an enemy; but how pleasant is it to be indebted to one we admire and love! They who, therefore, supremely love their God and Saviour, make their boast in the Lord. They will hereafter cast their crowns before the Throne; and their language now is, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

David supposes that his doing this would be known—"The humble shall hear thereof." They would possibly hear it from others: for the godly have their observers, and are "men wondered at." They were likely to hear it from himself. Therefore, says he, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his Name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue." Spiritual sadness seeks seclusion and concealment. Then, as the stricken deer leaves the herd, the man sitteth alone and keeps silence, because he has borne it upon him. Peter went out and wept bitterly. But spiritual freedom and joy soon discover themselves. Like the return of health, and of day, it says to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. When Hannah was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore, it is said, she prayed in her heart: only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. But when she had succeeded, she broke forth into a song, and said, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation."

David also inferred the effect this knowledge would produce in them—"The humble shall hear thereof, and be *glad*." He could reckon upon this, from his own disposition; and from the connexion there is between all the subjects of divine grace. They are all one in Christ Jesus. They belong to the same family: they are parts of the same body; and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice. They who have prayed for me, will not refuse to praise—"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy Name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me." What sight can be so gratifying to a good man, as to see a convert leaving the world, and entering the Church: a backslider returning into the path of peace: a believer walking worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called: a dying saint joyful in glory, and shouting aloud upon his bed?—They that fear Thee, will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy truth.

—The Lord's followers are supposed to be mopish and melancholy: but they have a thousand sources of joy which others know not of. How great is the pleasure they derive *even from others!* Indeed they can often rejoice on the behalf of their brethren, when they fear things are not going on well with themselves. But what a proof is this feeling, that their heart *is* right with God!

—Envy is the rottenness of the bones, and the temper of the Devil. To rejoice in another's good, is Christian—angelical—divine. God is love. And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him

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FEBRUARY 10.

"*Be sober.*"—1 Thess. v. 8.

This stands opposed to bodily excess, and especially to drunkenness. It is painful to think that it should be ever necessary even to mention such a subject among those who ever profess to be Christians. The Spartans presented to their children intoxicated slaves, that, seeing their beastly demeanour, they might detest the vice. Some Pagan legislators inflicted a double punishment upon crimes committed in a state of drunkenness. Christian lawgivers and judges are not equally wise and just; for how scandalous is it to hear men in a court of justice, allege their intoxication to extenuate, if not to justify, their conduct. Drunkenness takes away the man, and leaves the brute. It dethrones reason from its seat. It covers the wretch with rags. It reduces his wife and children

to want and beggary. It impairs appetite: produces trembling of the limbs; and such sinking of spirits, as compels to the repetition of the offence: so that, physically as well as morally, it is almost impossible to cure it.

Let me therefore guard against it; and not only in the *grossness*, but the *guilt*. Some professors of religion seem to think they are *not* chargeable with the sin, if they can keep their eyes open, and walk from the dining-room to the tea-table, not considering that every indulgence beyond natural relief and refreshment is vicious; and that the Scripture peculiarly condemns those, who, by gradual training, have made themselves *strong* to drink wine, and to mingle strong drink. Let me, therefore, beware of the encroaching *degree*. Let me put a knife to my throat if *given* to appetite. And instead of being filled with wine, wherein is excess, let me be filled with the Spirit.

But the pure and holy religion of Jesus, when it says, "Be sober," forbids much more than this vile and offensive practice. It enjoins temperance in *all* our appetites, desires, and affections. It extends even to business. As a man may be entangled, so he may be intoxicated with the affairs of this life: and how often do the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. *A Christian* may be too mindful of earthly things: too alive to fame; too anxious to join house to house, and add field to field, and to load himself with thick clay. As a man inebriated is unfit for the duties of his station, and is obliged to be confined; so it is with those who set their affection on things below. They are unqualified for their high calling; and cannot walk as becometh the Gospel.

"Seekest thou great things unto thyself!" says Jeremiah unto Baruch; "seek them not." Let me reflect, in the light of Scripture and observation, on the vanity of worldly things; their unsatisfactoriness in possession; their perishing in the using; the many and hurtful lusts to which they expose the owner; and let my conversation be without covetousness; and let me be content with such things as I have, for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

Sleep is a natural and necessary refreshment. But we may be excessive in this as well as in any other indulgence. And alas! how often are we so, even to the injury of our health, as well as the waste of our time.

Recreation is allowable and salutary. But we may exceed the bounds which the redemption of time, and the repairing and refitting us for duty, can only allow.

Paul exhorts Timothy to be "sober-minded." How intemperate are some in their opinions; and opinions, especially in religion, that regard inferior truths; and subjects concerning which the understanding meets with the greatest difficulties. Some are eager and rash, and positive in all their judgments; and nothing is too absurd or ridiculous for their adoption.

Again, let me hear the Apostle. "I say to every man that is amongst you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly." Let him not overrate his station, his connexions, his abilities, his usefulness, his performances. "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

Finally, let me not forget how *obviously*, as well as extensively, I am to discharge this obligation; nor lose sight for a moment of the *argument* by which it is enforced—"LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN UNTO ALL MEN THE LORD IS AT HAND."

FEBRUARY 11.

"*The children of the day.*"—1 Thess. v. 5.

THREE distinctions may be here made The first, regards Heathens. The second, the Jews. The third, Christians.

Heathens are the children of *night*. With regard to them, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. What did *they* know of God? of themselves? of their origin? their fall! their recovery? their duty! What did they know of a future state? A few of their philosophers spoke of the immortality of the soul; but none of them thought of the resurrection of the body, unless to turn it into ridicule. And what they expressed concerning the soul was but conjecture; they could prove and establish nothing. And they held it in unrighteousness; it had no influence over them as a motive; for, wanting the certainty of a principle, it wanted the efficacy. And they kept it from the people at large; and employed no means to inform the multitude, who, as quite sufficient for *them*, were abandoned to every kind of superstition.

The *Jews* were all children of the *dawn*; an intermediate state between night and day; better than the former, and very inferior to the latter. Hence the Saviour, alluding, not to the state of Pagans, but to the disadvantages of Judaism, said to his disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them." They had the Law which was given by Moses: but we have grace and truth, that came by Jesus Christ. They had the shadows; we have the substance. They had the types and the promises; we the realization and the accomplishment. To them the Sun of righteousness was below the horizon, on us he has risen with healing under his wings—God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Christians are the children of the *day*. It

is their privilege to have the system of revelation complete; and to be blessed with the full dispensation of the glorious Gospel. They have the servants of the Most High God, which show unto men the way of salvation.

Every thing with us is made clear in proportion as it is important. And with regard to the acceptance of our persons with God, the renovation of our nature, our title to eternal life, our meetness for glory, our supplies of grace, and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; the darkness is entirely passed, and the true light now shineth—and we are the children of the day.

Therefore, let us hail it with gratitude. And what thanks can ever equal the benefit? A mud cottage with the Scripture in it, is more ennobled, in the view of an angel, than the palace of the richest emperor upon earth. David would have descended from his throne, and have passed his days in a poor-house, to have enjoyed our advantages. Abraham, at the distance of near two thousand years, rejoiced to see our day, saw it, and was glad.

Therefore, let us receive it with joy. Nature shows off her beauties: the lambs play; the birds carol their notes—every thing seems to welcome the approach of day. Truly light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. And shall the Gospel, this day of good things, inspire us with dread and gloom? Is it not intended, is it not adapted to make even our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour? And was it not thus always regarded among the first Christians?

Therefore we should improve it with diligence. The sun ariseth, and man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening. The night is for inaction. They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober. And knowing the time, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Advantages infer obligations, and produce responsibility. Where much is given, much will be required. What do ye more than others? asks the Saviour. And he has a right to ask—

He also says, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. Blessed Jesus! possess me with thy own Spirit; and henceforth repelling every interruption, and crushing every indecision and delay, may I make thy purpose and zeal my own: "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day—the night cometh wherein no man can work."

FEBRUARY 12.

'*And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.*"—Numb. x. 31.

Such was the language of the Jewish leader to Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law. In whatever condition we are found, how numerous are our wants! We need food to nourish us, apparel to cover us, sleep to refresh us, friendship to succour us. We need the heart of one of our fellow-creatures, and the hand of another. One must be feet to us; another, eyes. Who is self-sufficient? Who, but under the delusion of pride and vanity, would ever affect independence? The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee. Nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body which are feeble, are necessary. Though above others in circumstances, we may be inferior to them in grace, or experience, or some particular attainment. David was superior to Jonathan in divine things; yet "Jonathan went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hands in God." I long to see you, says Paul to the Romans, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, that ye may be established: but they aided and confirmed him first: for they came down to meet him as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns; and when he saw them, *he* thanked God, and took courage.

Here we see the advantage of society. A God of knowledge and truth has said, It is not good for man to be alone; and if it was so with regard to a Paradise, how much more with regard to a wilderness! Half the pleasure of solitude, it has been remarked, arises from our having a friend at hand to whom we can say, How delightful this retirement is! Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Why, but to encourage social devotion, did our Saviour say to his disciples, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Why did he send forth the seventy, two by two, in their mission through Judea, but to comfort each other in distress? to confer with each other in cases of perplexity? to stimulate each other in cases of languor? to cheek each other in cases of temptation? "Two are better than one; because they have good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

Let none despond. As all are required to be useful, so all may be serviceable, if they will: and often, far beyond the probability of their condition, or their own hope; for humility makes a good man modest in his expectations, as well as in his pretensions.

We also see here, that confidence in God is not to lead us to disregard any advantages we can derive from ordinary resources. Moses had the engagement of God, and was even under a miraculous guidance: yet he does not overlook the assistance he could derive from his father-in-law, as to his advice in difficulties; and those instructions, which, from his knowledge of the Wilderness, he could give him, with regard to particular situations, and their conveniences or inconveniences. The religion of the Bible is always a reasonable service. It does not keep a man's eyes upon the stars, while he falls over every stumbling-block in his way; but says to him, "Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee: ponder the path of thy feet, that thy goings may be established." It places our dependence upon God; but that reliance is favourable to activity, and is the spring of it. In Him we live, move, and have our being; but this does not supersede eating and drinking. He teaches us; but we are to read and hear his word. He promises; but he will be inquired of for the performance. And none of the aids he affords us render needless the exercise of prudence, the exertion of our faculties, the offices of friendship, or the means of grace. "Draw nigh to God; and he will draw nigh to you."

FEBRUARY 13.

"*Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.*" Psalm xxv. 16—18.

SURELY this book is addressed to the heart; and requires sensibility rather than talent to understand and explain it. How tender here is the language of David. And how instructive too. He was a sufferer, though a king, and a man eminently godly. And his sorrows were not superficial, but deep and depressing—"the sorrows of the heart." And while hoping for their diminution, they were "enlarged."

—But he is a petitioner, as well as a sufferer; and those sorrows will never injure us that bring us to God. Three things he prays for.

First. Deliverance. This we are allowed to desire, consistently with resignation to the divine will. But we must seek it, not from creatures, but from God, who has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Nothing is too hard for him—He can turn the shadow of death into the morning—Therefore, says David, "O bring thou me out of my distresses."

Secondly. Notice. A kind look from God is desirable at any time, in any circumstances; but in affliction and pain, it is like life from the dead. Nothing cuts like the neglect of a friend in distress; nothing soothes like his calls and inquiries, and sympathy, and tears.—But to say, Thou God seest me; thou knowest all my walking through this great wilderness—to be assured that he is attentive to my condition, and is smiling through the cloud; fills the heart, even in tribulation, with a peace that passeth all understanding—Therefore, says David, "Look upon mine affliction and pain."

Thirdly. Pardon. He does not think himself sinless; and trials are apt to revive a sense of guilt, and to make the sufferer fearful; and to induce the prayer, "Do not condemn me." We will also venture to say, that however a Christian may feel his sorrows, he will feel his sins much more. These, these are the burden and the grief—Therefore, David says, "Forgive all my sins."

This was his meaning; and I hope I can make it my own.—If it be thy pleasure, release me from my complaint.—If not, and the distress is continued, to try me, be near to afford me a sensible manifestation of thy favour; let me see thy countenance; let me hear thy voice, saying, "I remember thee still."—Or if this be denied, and I have no claim upon thee for such an indulgence, let me, for the Redeemer's sake, be absolved and justified. Remove my guilt, whatever becomes of my grief—grief *then* cannot be penal—cannot be injurious—

> "If sin be pardon'd, I'm secure,
> *Death* hath no sting beside:
> The law gives sin its damning power;
> But Christ, my ransom, died."

FEBRUARY 14.

"*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*"—John xv. 14.

HE does not say, ye are the subjects of my love; but, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." You may love an animal, a slave, an enemy; but neither of these can be your friend; for friendship implies and requires what their condition does not admit. It is a remarkable expression that Moses employs, when he says, "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy FRIEND who is as thine OWN SOUL." It seems to place a friend above all the relations of kindred: and Solomon does not scruple to say, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Friendship has always been deemed essential to the happiness of human beings, and indeed to their very honour: for it would be thought disgraceful as it is disconsolate not to have a friend. No peculiarity of condition, or elevation of rank, sets a man above

the attraction and utility of friendship. Kings have laid aside their royalties to indulge in it; and Alexander would have found a conquered world a kind of desert without an Ephestion.

It is needless to enlarge on the excellency and value of this blessing. Who is not ready to acknowledge that friendship is the delight of youth; the pillar of age; the bloom of prosperity; the charm of solitude; the solace of adversity; the best benefactor and comforter in this vale of tears? But the question is, where a friend is to be found! It will be allowed that many who wear the name are unworthy of the title; and that even those who are sincere in their professions, may be chargeable with infirmities. Yet even human friendship is not an utopian good. He who says, all men are liars, says it in his haste, or from a heart that judges of others by itself. They who complain most are commonly the most to be complained of. There is *real* friendship to be found on earth. But there is better in heaven. And in our text we have the advantage in the highest of all examples. In others, we may have the reality, and even the eminency of friendship, but in the Lord Jesus we have the perfection, the divinity of it.

But what is necessary to our claiming it? Ye are my friends, says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." By this he shows us, that though he is the friend, he is also the lawgiver. Under whatever character he reveals himself, we are never to lose sight of the Sovereign. His goodness is to display his greatness, not to weaken it. He is the Prince as well as the Saviour—He "commands" his friends. And nothing less than obedience to his will is required of us. It is not enough to read it, and hear it, and know it, and talk of it, and profess it—we must "*do*" it. And our obedience must be impartial; we must do "whatsoever" he commands us. Obedience may be sincere, without being perfect in the degree; but it cannot be sincere, without being universal in the principle and disposition. For if I do some things which he enjoins me, and not others, it follows that what I do, I do from some other motive than his authority—for this would lead me to observe *all* he enjoins. True obedience will not suffer me to select, any more than to dictate—its only inquiry is, "Lord, *what* wilt thou have me to do!" He who commands me to enter his gates with thanksgiving, tells me also to enter my closet. He who forbids me to steal, tells me to speak evil of no man. Can I say, with David, "I esteem *all* thy commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate *every* false way!"

With regard to the connexion, however, between this friendship and this obedience, let it not be supposed that it is a meritorious one—as if the practice deserved the privilege. This is impossible, and the notion subverts the Gospel of Christ. Yet it is a certain connexion; and as certain both in its exclusion and inclusion as the nature of things and the word of truth can make it. And it is an encouraging connexion. Had the requisition turned on worldly honour, or wealth, or genius, or science, many must have despaired. But the essential is not derived from condition, but conduct. It is therefore within the reach of the poor, as well as of the rich; and of the illiterate, as well as the learned. All may be great in the sight of the Lord; and he is the greatest, whatever be his circumstances in life, who best obeys his Lord and Saviour. Mary was blessed in being his mother; but this was a privilege necessarily confined to one individual. He, therefore, when he heard the exclamation of the woman, Blessed be the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked! instantly mentions a way to a higher privilege, and which lies open to every one—"Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

Pray, therefore, "O that my feet were directed to keep thy precepts!" "Many will entreat the favour of the prince, and every one is a friend to him that giveth gifts." But when you seek the regards of the great, what base compliances are often necessary to please them—and you are never sure of succeeding—and when you succeed—what have you gained? But His work is honourable and glorious. If you seek, you are sure to find. And whoso findeth him, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. However unobserved or neglected among men you may be, no one can pass your door, and say, "There dwells a friendless person."

Lord Brooks was so charmed with that rare and accomplished personage, Sir Philip Sydney, that he would have no other inscription on his tomb than this—"Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sydney."

Ah! says the Christian, I envy not those whose sepulchre will be adorned with the trophies of war, the pride of heraldry, or the renown of science. Let my humble grave tell, and tell truly—"Here lies the friend of Christ."

FEBRUARY 15.

"*And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the Temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.*"—Acts iii. 9, 10.

His walking was a proof of the reality and perfection of the cure. His praising God was the proper improvement of it.

But what an attestation was here to the divine mission of the Apostles, and so to the

truth of Christianity itself! We *speak*, said they, in his name who was crucified—and if you ask for a proof of it, we will *act* in his Name. Bring forth your dumb, and we will give them speech; your blind, and we will open their eyes; your sick, and we will heal them; your lame, and we will make them leap as an hart. This was evidence adapted to persons of every rank and capacity. It required no laboured process of reasoning and eloquence. It was the broad seal of heaven, which all could see and understand.

And there was nothing like artifice or collusion in these miracles. Take the case before us. The patient resided, not in a remote place, but in Jerusalem; that is, in the midst of the enemies of the Apostles. He had been lame from his mother's womb. He was now upwards of forty years old. He was well known: he was a beggar. Multitudes had seen him: many had relieved him; and many had handled him—for he was carried daily to the place of begging. And this was not an obscure corner, but the entrance into the Temple. And the thing was not done in the night, but at nine o'clock in the morning, when there was a concourse of people.

Put all this together; and then ask whether any thing could have been fairer. Could any thing have been more open to detection, had there been any imposture? Compare such an achievement with the prodigies of Heathenism, and the miracles of the Romish Church.

And see, also, what can equal the *credulity* of unbelievers! What is the faith of a Christian, to *their* belief? Christians believe difficulties, because the truth of them is abundantly confirmed; but *they* admit improbabilities and impossibilities. Their rejection of the Gospel cannot arise from an intellectual, but a moral cause. They do not want evidence, but disposition—they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Therefore, how can they escape, if they neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto them by those that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Need I tremble for the cause of Christianity? Need my reason be ashamed of my faith?

> "Hence, and for ever, from my heart,
> I bid my doubts and fears depart;
> And to those hands my soul resign
> That bear credentials so divine."

FEBRUARY 16.

"*They serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"—Dan. iii. 12.

The refusal of these three young men was as trying as it was noble. The resolution has immortalized them. Let us observe how much they had to overcome in adhering to it.

They could plead *authority*. Here was the command of their sovereign: and good men are to be good subjects. They honour principalities and powers; they obey magistrates, and are ready to every good work. But there is a difference between civil and spiritual claims. We are, indeed, to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; but we must also render unto God the things that are God's. If any being requires us to do what is opposed to the revealed will of God, we are prevented by an authority from which there can lie no appeal; and we ought to obey God rather than man. Thus the midwives did not as the King of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive: "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses."

This conscientiousness, however, has often given the conduct of God's servants an appearance of insubordination and revolt; and their enemies have not failed to seize it, and turn it to their discredit. Jesus was not Cæsar's friend; and stirred up the people. The Apostles turned the world upside down. And, doubtless, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were censured and vilified for their disloyalty.

They could plead *obligation*. Nebuchadnezzar was not only their sovereign, but their friend and benefactor. He had educated them in a princely manner, and advanced them to the most honourable charges. And nothing tries like tenderness. Benefits attract and attach the heart: and good men are the most susceptible of grateful impressions. One of the most painful things in the world to an ingenuous mind, is to refuse the wishes of one who has done much for him; for there is nothing in which he would more delight, were he not restrained by principle. Suppose a dutiful child. He loves and honours his parents; and he ought to honour them. These parents, in other respects, are kind and good—but they are worldly, and require him to go into the dissipations of life; they are irreligious, and forbid him to attend what according to his conviction, is the truth of God—and, instead of threatening, they weep over him, and beseech him, by every tender motive, not to break their hearts, nor bring down their gray heirs with sorrow to the grave. Now to loosen from such embraces and entreaties; and act a part that *looks* like disrespect—at the hearing of a voice that cries, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me:" here is a trial hardly supportable. And much of this, these young men would feel, at the thought of the favours which had been heaped upon them.

They could plead *universality of compliance*. All besides obey; and why should they

stand alone, and affect to be better than every one else? How often is this objection thrown out! Singularity, for its own sake, argues a little and a vain mind: vain, because it seeks notice; and little, because it can attain it in no better way. In things harmless and indifferent, we may lawfully conform to the usages of the day and place wherein we live; but where truth, and duty, and conscience are concerned, we must be steadfast and immoveable, though deserted, opposed, ridiculed by all; and by unsought, but indispensable singularity, evince the purity of our motives, and the dignity of our principles. So did Abdiel,

> "————Faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful he
> Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
> Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified;
> His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.
> Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
> To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
> Though single."

So did Joshua, and Caleb, and Lot, and Noah. And all Christians are required not to be conformed to the world. And Jesus died to redeem and purify unto himself a peculiar people; and peculiar they must be while the multitude do evil. Well, said these sufferers, if all yield, we must not—we will not—whatever be the consequence.

And they could plead the *dreadfulness of the penalty.* We are often ready to justify or excuse our conduct by the pressure of circumstances; and to allege that the trial is too great for our virtue. And what is the trial? What are our difficulties and perils in the path of duty? If we follow such a course—Well, shall we be bound to the stake? or thrown into a den of lions? or a fiery furnace? No. Shall we then be deprived of our liberty? and confined in a prison? or be stripped of our property? and reduced to beggary? No such thing—Blessed be the laws of this happy land. Behold our jeopardies and sacrifices! We may lose a trifle of our profit by not selling or working on the Sabbath. We may have less to hoard by giving alms to the needy. If we follow our convictions, we may lose the smile of a friend; or incur the sneer of a fool. By the redeeming our time, we may even be constrained to leave the bed of sloth a little earlier in the morning—These are our tribulations because of the Word! These are the martyrs of our day! Ye professors of religion, who can exercise no self-denial, who can take up no cross; "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Look at these youths! What had they to lose! What to suffer! A fiery furnace! Before their eyes! Into which they were to be instantly thrown!

FEBRUARY 17.

"*Rejoice the soul of thy servant.*"
Psalm lxxxvi. 4.

The queen of Sheba not only admired Solomon, but hailed his attendants. "Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants that stand continually before thee." What then is it to be a servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords!

A servant of God, however, is not one that only subserves his designs. This, by an overruling Providence, all do, even the wicked themselves. But one, who, from conviction and disposition, resigns himself to his will, and holds himself at his disposal. One who always asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" always prays, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

And can such a man as this want spiritual joy? Yes, even David himself, that eminent servant of God, prays, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant." We ask, If I am his, why am I thus? We think our course of experience singular; but while we complain, we are passing by the very landmarks which those who have gone before us have set up to tell us that we are right. Our state is one thing, our joy is another: the former remains always the same, the latter often varies.

Our safety does not depend upon our knowledge; but our comfort is much affected by it; and sometimes a servant of God has but very imperfect views of those glorious truths which make us "free indeed." Sometimes he may be depressed by his bodily frame and infirmities. Sometimes, too, he is under divine rebuke for sin—for this it is that separates between God and the soul. We should therefore search and try our ways. Is there not a cause? If the consolations of God are small with us, is there no secret thing with us? Is there no worm at the root of our withering gourd? No Achan in the camp, the troubler of Israel? Joab besieges Abel, and threatens to destroy it. A woman cries out to him to know the cause. He answers, There is one Sheba, the son of Bichri, a traitor to the king. Cast him over the wall, and I will withdraw. And so it was. And thus, if we would have peace with God, we must sacrifice every usurper, saying,

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from thy throne,
> And worship only Thee."

—But a servant of God will value what he may want. He prizes it, not only because God has commanded and promised it; but because he knows, from experience, that the joy of the Lord is his strength. He has seen how it emboldened his profession, and enlivened his zeal, and weaned his heart from the world, and revived him in the midst of trouble. He

has tasted its sweetness. He can never lose the relish of it; and this excites him to pray, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

For he is sure that God is alone the source and giver of it, and therefore to *Him* he goes —"Rejoice the soul of thy servant." It is very desirable to see the morning after a dark night; and the spring after a cold barren winter. But what makes the morning, and the spring? Not all the lamps or fires in the world; but the sun. And the Lord God is the sun, as well as the shield of his people. All our light, and life, and bloom, are from Him: and in him is our fruit found. He is the God, not only of all grace, but of all comfort.

It is he that comforts us in any of our common mercies; otherwise our sleep would not refresh us, nor our food nourish us, nor our friends cheer us. And what would the means of grace be, if he was not in them? God, says the Apostle, comforted us by the coming of Titus—not Titus, but God *by* Titus. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers *by* whom ye believed, even as *God* gave to every man? Luther says, it is as easy to make a world, as to ease a troubled conscience.—But

> "The troubled conscience knows Thy voice:
> Thy cheering words awake our joys;
> Thy words allay the stormy wind,
> And calm the surges of the mind."

FEBRUARY 18.

"*Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.*"—Rom. i. 10, 11.

At this time Paul had not seen Rome. But how natural was it in a man of his taste and intelligence to wish to see it! Nothing had made such a figure in history as this imperial city. From a kind of village, it extended in a course of years till it became the mistress of the nations, and the metropolis of the world. How powerfully must curiosity have been awakened—by its extent, its majesty, its edifices, its institutions, its laws, and customs! Paul was also a citizen; and while some, with a great ransom, purchased this privilege, he was free-born. Yet his longing to see it was not to indulge the man and the Roman, but the Christian and the Apostle—He longed to impart to the beloved and called of God there, some "spiritual benefit."

But see the order of divine grace. Before he was useful to them, *they* imparted some spiritual benefit to him, and established his wavering confidence. For when he had landed at Puteoli, and advanced towards Rome, the brethren came to meet him as far as the Appii Forum and the Three Taverns: "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." Here we see, that the most eminent servants of God may be depressed and desponding; and that it is possible for them to derive assistance and comfort from those who are much inferior to them in office, condition, abilities, and grace. There is no such thing as independence. Let none be proud. Let none despair. The Christian church is a body; and the body is not one member, but many. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

But how was this prosperous journey according to the will of God, for which he made so many requests, accomplished? How little did he imagine the way in which he was to visit this famous city—He enters it, indeed—but in the character of a prisoner, driven thither by persecution; and after being shipwrecked upon a certain island! So high are God's thoughts above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways! So little do we know what we pray for! So often by strange, and sometimes by terrible things in righteousness, does he answer us as the God of our salvation! So fulfils He the promise —"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

FEBRUARY 19.

"*And when he thought thereon, he wept.*" Mark xiv. 72.

Doddridge supposes that this is intended to express, not only the immediate sensibility of Peter, but his feeling through life; and that he always wept at the thought of his vile and ungrateful conduct. His sin was certainly very aggravated; and, with all his failings, he was a man of very tender affections, and great ingenuousness.

But sorrow arising from such a source is not peculiar to our Apostle. All the people of God should feel a penitent disposition at the review of their sin.

And who, when they look back, can be at a loss for materials of self-accusation and contrition? There are the sins of our unregenerate condition. There are the sins we have been capable of, since we have been called to the knowledge of the truth. All these we are to judge of, not by their grossness, but by their guilt. In the number of our sins, we are to rank our omissions of duty; our non improvement of our time and talents; the

defectiveness of our aims and motives; and the departures of our heart in love and confidence from the blessed God.

Some would prevent the effect of such self-inspections, by the notion, that there is no evil in the sins of God's people. But their sins are worse than those of others. by reason of the nearer relations in which, and the greater obligations under which, they are committed. They have also, in sinning, greater difficulties to overcome. They have not only to sin against greater love, but greater light: and they have been convinced of the evil and bitterness of sin; and have had a wounded spirit which they could not bear. Their sins, also, are more injurious with regard to others: distressing the strong; stumbling the weak; confirming the prejudiced; hardening the wicked; causing the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and the way of truth to be evil spoken of. And is all this nothing? Did Micah think so? Who, says he, is a God like unto him, who passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage!

But suppose the Christian is led to see, that his standing is secure; and that God is pacified towards him. Will he weep then? Yes; he will weep the more. The goodness of God will lead him to repentance; and he will sorrow after a godly sort, like a dying saint, who being asked why he wept? answered, I weep—not that my sins may be pardoned—but because I hope they are pardoned.

Let us, then, never be ashamed or afraid of such tears as Peter shed. Nothing is so becoming and reasonable. Other grief may be excused; but this can be justified. Other sorrow may render us amiable in the eyes of our fellow-creatures; but this is extolled of God: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, *thou* wilt not despise." This brings us within the reach of the promises—"They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy;" "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." It is not easy, or perhaps possible, to make others comprehend this—but there is a pleasure even in the frame itself; and they who are the subjects of it well know, that their happiest moments are their most tender ones; and, with Augustine, they can bless God for the "grace of tears." Here is a proof of our being under the renewing of the Holy Ghost. If the heart of stone was not taken away, how could I feel and grieve? And if there was nothing in me but nature, how could I feel and grieve for sin? There is nothing more useful in the divine life than this disposition. It endears the Saviour and his atonement, and his righteousness, and his intercession, and his grace. It makes me cautious and circumspect: in this temper of mind I cannot expose myself to temptation, or trifle with sin; but be always watchful and prayerful. Blessed is the man that feareth always.

"'Tis joy enough, my All in All,
At thy dear feet to lie:
Thou wilt not let me lower fall,
And none can higher fly."

FEBRUARY 20.

"*Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*"—Malachi iv. 2.

They were before in *darkness* and *disease*; both of which *confine*. But the Sun of righteousness arises, and with healing under his wings: and thus the true light now shining, and health being restored, they become free and active—They go forth, and—grow up as calves of the stall.

For even now they have not attained: they are not already perfect. Nor are they to remain what they are, but to increase with all the increase of God. Some tell us there is no growth in grace—As if Christians could not be more wise, more humble, more patient, more zealous, than they are—As if Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians was a falsehood, when he told them that their faith grew exceedingly, and the charity of every one of them towards each other abounded—As if Peter enjoined an absurdity when he admonished Christians to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour—As if God himself mocked or trifled when he said, "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger!"

We are not to deny what God has done for our souls. Yea, we ought to be thankful, if we have only light enough to see our darkness, and feeling enough to be sensible of our hardness.

"Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
Yet, since I *feel* it so,
It yields some hope of life divine
Within, however low."

But though we must not despise the day of small things, we are not to be satisfied with it. A day of greater things is attainable; and if we do not aspire after it, we have reason to suspect even the reality of our religion. Spiritual principles may be weak, but if they are divine, they will evince it by a tendency to growth.

The sacred writers express this progression by every kind of growth.—By human growth—We read of babes, little children, young men, and those of full age, who have their senses exercised, by reason of use, to discern both good and evil.—By vegetable growth—Thus we read, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear: they shall spring as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses; they shall grow as the lily, they shall grow as the vine.—Here we have animal growth—They shall

grow up as calves of the stall. No creatures perhaps increase so rapidly and observably as these, especially when, as here, they are well attended and fed, and for the very purpose of bettering.

We have sometimes been reminded of the truth of this image, by the spiritual reality. We have seen those, who, in a little time, have surprised all around them, by their progress in the divine life. So clear and full have been their views of the things of God. So established have their hearts been with grace. So simply and entirely have they depended upon the Saviour. So decided have they been in their separation from the spirit of the world; and yet so concerned to be useful in it. So spiritual have they been in their conversation: and yet so free from all religious grimace and affectation. So ready have they been to do good and communicate in the cause of the poor, and the cause of Christ. Such a living sacrifice have they presented in their bodies and spirits. So have they adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

But, alas! as to many of us, we have reason to exclaim, "My leanness, my leanness!" How little progress have we made in religious knowledge, experience, practice, and usefulness, though we have possessed every advantage, and long enjoyed the means of grace. After all the discipline of his family, the instructions of his word, the ordinances of his house, how dull are our ears of hearing! how slow of heart are we to believe! how much do our souls cleave unto the dust! how affected are we with the things of time and sense! and how little actuated are we by the powers of a world to come! At present the comparison reproves us.

But let it also excite and encourage. It not only reminds us of our duty, but of our privilege. This growth is not only commanded but promised—It is therefore attainable. And we know the way to our resources. Jesus came, not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

FEBRUARY 21.

"*And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.*"—Numb. xxi. 4.

The people of God are held forth under various characters in the Scriptures: and no one of them all is more common, more just, more pleasing, more instructive, than the image of strangers and pilgrims upon earth. And who knows not what a beautiful use Bunyan has made of it—

> "Ingenious dreamer, in whose well-told tale
> Sweet fiction and sweet truth alike prevail.
> ——— whose PILGRIM marks the road,
> And guides the PROGRESS of the soul to God."

But what is there in the way to discourage the soul of the travellers heaven-ward?—Much. Sometimes they are affected by the length of the way. For hope deferred maketh the heart sick. This was the case with Israel at this time: for instead of passing through the land of Edom, they had to fetch a compass all around the borders; and all this in a wilderness too, and under a burning sky. If a traveller, after supposing he was near his journey's end, was to learn that it was yet many miles off—all worn and weary, his heart would be ready to faint; and utter the cry of despondence, "I shall never reach it!" What Isaiah says, "They shall behold the land that is very far off," may be applied to the experience of Christians with regard to heaven. It is often remote in fact: that is, it is frequently long before they arrive there. For they are not removed hence, as soon as they are converted; but detained here, to be made meet for their destination, to honour their Redeemer, and to serve their generation. Hence many of them are longer on earth after they are called by grace, than the Jews wandered in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. But we refer to the slowness of their progress, the smallness of their attainments, and the nature of their apprehensions. "Once," says the soul, "I was ready to seize the blessing; but now it seems to recede as I advance: yea, the distance between me and the attainment seems to increase daily." "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord! for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning"—"O when will it dawn—When wilt thou come unto me?"

Sometimes they are discouraged because of the way, owing to the enemies that infest it. In the re-building of the second temple, we are told, that every man with one hand wrought in the work, and with the other held a weapon—this was sore labour. And the Christian's life is a warfare, as well as a pilgrimage: he moves on, bearing his sword, as well as his staff—now to walk and fight too—and to contend every step of the way—and with adversaries possessing every thing to render them formidable—and as soon as one is vanquished, to see another rising up—this is arduous and trying. And what wonder, if, when without are fightings, within are fears?

Then the way shows many that are turning back in it; and this is often discouraging We had heard of their setting off. Some of them had passed us near enough to be observed

They soon left us, seeming to surpass us, not only in gifts, but grace—and we not only hailed, but envied them. How wonderful and grievous to see them returning, vicious, or infidel, or lovers of this present world. We instantly remember, and apply to *them* the awful declaration, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." But who can help thinking of *himself?* And what am I! And may not I also prove a cast-away?

Besides, these revolters never come back silent. They solicit us to return too. They assure us the way is impassable. They have tried it; and hope their experience will make us wise. Once they thought certain notions to be erroneous; and certain indulgences to be sinful; but they are more enlightened and liberal now. Such persons, too, never subside into neutrals. From friends they necessarily become enemies. They persecute, if it lies in their power. They always reproach and vilify, even in their own defence—defaming the party and the cause—to justify their secession from them.

It is often discouraging, also, to find the way so narrow—"Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life." The difficulty, therefore, of getting on, is great. A way is made narrow by the near approximation of the sides, whether walls, ditches, or hedges; so that we have to press through; and can hardly do it without some injury on the right hand or on the left. In the exercise of every grace, and the performance of every duty, a Christian has to keep between two extremes. As to the use of the means of grace, he must neither neglect them nor idolize them. As to connexions and relations in life, he may sin by not loving them enough: or by loving them too much. Courage lies between rashness and fear; and frugality, between profusion and niggardliness; and confidence, between presumption and despondency; and patience, between despising the chastening of the Lord, and fainting when we are rebuked of him. And is it easy always to go, not only in the way of righteousness, but in the *midst* of the paths of judgment!

So far, generally, of the road. But there are particular parts that are peculiarly trying—Such as the Slough of Despond—the Valley of Humiliation—the Hill Difficulty with the lions—and the deep cold River to be waded through, before the Shining City can be entered. A Christian knows what all this means; and sometimes finds it hard to believe that the way to glory lies through it all.

Am I then setting out for the heavenly world? Let me not prepare myself for surprise and disappointment, by expecting that every thing will be smooth, and flowery, and delightful. I cannot, indeed, look for too much from the promises of God—they are so exceeding great and precious; but I must look for it in God's own order. I must deny myself, and take up my cross. I must not be slothful, but be a follower of them, who through faith and patience have reached the prize of their high calling.

Have I professed, and hoped that I am a Christian? Let me not conclude, that I have no part nor lot in the matter, because my soul is sometimes cast down and disquieted within me. Have not those who have gone before me wept and groaned also! Are not the subjects of divine grace represented by their fear, as well as their confidence? by their sorrow, as well as their joy?

Yet let me endeavour to go on rejoicing. Let me remember, that there is much to encourage me because of the way. An unerring guide—an almighty guard—companions—strength to hold on—refreshments along the road—and the end of it perfect rest, and peace, and glory, and joy.

"Our journey is a thorny maze,
But we march upward still;
Forget these troubles of the way,
And reach at Zion's hill.

"See the kind angels at the gates
Inviting us to come:
There Jesus, the forerunner, waits
To welcome travellers home.

"There on a green and flowery mount
Our weary souls shall sit,
And with transporting joys recount
The labours of our feet."

FEBRUARY 22.

"*Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water.*"—Exod. xxiii. 25.

Our chief concern should be to secure those blessings which will supply the soul and endure for ever. He only is truly blessed who is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Our Saviour, therefore, says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—yet he does not scruple to say, "And all *these* things shall be added unto you." Temporal benefits are not beneath the attention of our kind Father. He knoweth that we have need of these things before we ask him. He knoweth our frame; and he knoweth our fears. And not only under the Law, but under the Gospel, godliness is profitable unto all things; and has promises of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

The promise before us extends to all the temporal support of his people; but there is wisdom in the language. In another place it is also said, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." Is not the specification designed to check not only anxiety, but ambition and avarice? Does it not say, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have."

Nothing can do us good without the blessing of God; but his blessing commands what it announces: and what he blesses, *is* blessed. Hence a *little* that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. It is more *efficient*. It goes further: as Philip Henry was wont to say to his family—"My dear children, the grace of God will make a little go a great way." It is surprising to see with what a slender income many Christians keep up a decent appearance, and owe no man any thing, and even give to him that needeth. The thing is, "The secret of the Lord is upon their tabernacle." But while he blesses the habitation of the just, his curse is in the house of the wicked. And then nothing prospers. They seem a wonder to themselves and others. They get much and gain nothing. So it was with the selfish and illiberal Jews when they came back from Babylon, and built their own ceiled houses, while the house of God lay waste. Had they minded his affairs, he would have minded theirs; and have proved that we cannot serve God for nought. But now, says God, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."

It is also more *satisfying*. For the state of the mind conduces to the relish of every outward comfort; and in the Christian this state of mind is grateful, and peaceful, and cheerful, arising from a hope of reconciliation with God. His frown would darken a thousand suns. But every thing smiles when he smiles.

> "How sweet our daily comforts prove,
> When they are season'd with his love!"

And we see the dear medium through which they come as covenant blessings:

> "*He* sunk beneath our heavy woes,
> To raise us to his throne;
> There 's not a gift his hand bestows,
> But cost his heart a groan."

—The wicked feast without fear. But there is reason enough why they *should* fear. Neglecting the service of God, they are strangers to his blessing. Left to themselves, every advantage and indulgence operating upon their depravity, contributes to their guilt and misery. Their table becomes a snare; and that which should have proved for their welfare, becomes a trap. The prosperity of fools destroys them. Now consider this, ye that forget God. And, without delay, seek to be numbered with the seed which the Lord hath blessed.

FEBRUARY 23.

"*Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*"—James v. 20.

And can *we* convert the sinner from the error of his way! Yes—or the language would be futile. But *how* can we do this? Not meritoriously—this would invade the office and glory of the Lord Jesus: for He only delivers us from the wrath to come: He only saves his people from their sins. Not efficiently—this would invade the work and honour of the Holy Spirit: for we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. There is therefore only one way in which *we* can convert a sinner; and that is instrumentally. But this does not detract from divine agency: there is no inconsistency between agency and instrumentality. A pen is nothing without a hand to use it. An instrument always supposes and requires an agent. But is the converse of this proposition true? Does an agent always require an instrument? It is so with us; but not with a Being whose will is efficiency; and who said, Let there be light, and there was light. Yet what God is not compelled to do from weakness, he chooses to do from wisdom. He therefore works by means. We know of nothing that he does immediately. He fans us by the breeze, and warms us by the sun, and refreshes us by sleep, and sustains us by food. And as it is in nature, so it is in grace. Among the Corinthians God gave the increase, but Paul planted, and Apollos watered. Their faith came not *from* them; but Paul and Apollos were ministers *by* whom they believed. We mean not, however, by this reference, to confine this work to ministers. James alludes not only or chiefly to them; but to Christians at large. All may be useful here; and in a thousand ways exert themselves to accomplish this blessed and glorious design.

For he who effects it is the greatest of all benefactors—for "he saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins!" And what is every other achievement compared with this? Nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. So will all those judge who walk by faith; and believe the testimony of God concerning —The value of a soul! The dreadfulness of eternal death! And the absolute necessity of forgiveness, in order to the man's escape from the damnation of hell!

The work therefore is its own reward. Spurious beneficence always wishes to excite notice: and the man, in some way or other, aims, or he will do nothing, to make it conducive to his own interest. But true charity seeketh not its own, but the welfare of the object; and if *that* end be answered, the benefactor is satisfied. James knew this; and mentions nothing else by way of motive—but the thing itself. He does not tell his brethren, that if they convert a sin-

ner they shall be applauded here, or recompensed at the resurrection of the just—It is true that they *will* derive honour and advantage from their usefulness. They that water, shall be watered also. The sinners they save will pray for them; and, if they die first, when they fail, will receive them into everlasting habitations; and in the day of the Lord Jesus they will be their joy and crown. But this is the effect, and not the principle of their zeal. It is enough if they succeed—enough if they can save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

And the prospect of success in such a case, however *limited*, should be sufficient to animate us. Some may be privileged to bless numbers. But James speaks of "the sinner," and "a soul." This agrees with the language of our Lord, who tells us, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over *one* sinner that repenteth." This brings the encouragement home to all. All cannot be Luthers, to reform countries; or Whitfields, to preach to thousands; or Careys, to translate the Scriptures into other tongues. But can we do nothing? Surely some one soul is thrown in our way to whom we may be useful—a child—a servant—a relative—a neighbour.

James would have us *think* of this; and think *much* of it. "Let him *know*, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." And who does not know this? Yea, were we to judge from their practice, we should be ready to ask, Who does know it? What is the knowledge that answers no end? It is not enough to believe—we must remember and reflect: we must follow out our convictions. This fine sentiment must be present to the mind—at all times—and in all conditions—when we are alone and when we are in company—when we pray and when we speak—when we sit in our house—and when we walk by the way—and when we lie down—and when we rise up—we must bind it as a sign upon our hand—and wear it as a frontlet between our eyes—and write it upon the posts of our door and upon our gates—"Let him KNOW, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

FEBRUARY 24.

"*They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.*"—Zech. ix. 16.

HERE we see the dignity of the Lord's people. They are "stones," precious stones, set in the "crown" of the King of kings. For such is the infinite goodness of God, that he not only spares, but pardons and justifies them. In his righteousness they are exalted. They are not only saved, but ennobled. With kings are they upon the throne. They are naturally in a low estate, and are viler than the earth; but he raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill. And though the world knoweth them not, and they are little and low in their own eyes, and it doth not yet appear what they shall be, yet now are they the sons of God; and since they have been precious in his sight, they have been honourable, and he has loved them, and calls them his jewels, and a peculiar treasure unto him. And all those who in his light see light, view them in the same way. They remember the time when they began to honour them that fear the Lord; when they took hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; when they prayed to see the good of his chosen. Then they seemed to regard them as more than human beings; and while, above all things, they desired communion with them, they felt unworthy of their presence and notice. And though, since then, they have found that they are not already perfect, yet they know that they are the excellent of the earth, and that they are more excellent than their neighbours. There is often more real virtue in their failings than in the very devotions of others: "the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abiezer."

Here is also their exhibition—these stones of a crown are "lifted up." They are not to be concealed. Our Saviour compares them to a city set, not in a valley, but on a hill which cannot be hid; and to a candle, placed, not under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. And when he calls them by his grace, he says to the "prisoners," "Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves: they shall feed in the *ways*, and their pasture shall be on all *high* places." Christians need not be concealed: every thing in their religion will bear examination, and challenges the eyes of all, whether infidels, or philosophers, or politicians, or moralists. They ought not to be concealed: every thing in their religion is adapted to do good; but for this purpose it must be known. They cannot be concealed: their principles must operate; the sun cannot shine without showing itself.

Here is also their utility—these stones of a crown are to be lifted up "as an ensign upon his land." An oriflamme suspended over the royal tent; and designed to attract and aggregate followers to the cause in which he is engaged. Thus the Saviour himself is spoken of: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." But what

Christ is, Christians are, subordinately indeed, yet really. Hence their calling, to hold forth the word of life. They are placed and displayed, to reprove, and convince, and excite, and encourage others to seek and serve God. They are witnesses for him. They are trophies of the power and greatness, and riches of his grace. They proclaim what he is able and willing to do. And saved by him, they are all employed for him; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God.

FEBRUARY 25.

"*Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.*"—Rom. xvi. 15.

Admitting that the Bible be the word of God, we might have inferred, from his wisdom and goodness, that no part of it can be useless. But we are expressly assured, that "all Scripture *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Therefore this long postscript, this catalogue of particular salutations, has its uses. It certainly shows us the principle that actuated the first Christians—all men were to know that they were the disciples of Christ, by their loving one another. It shows, also, how mistaken they are who think the New Testament does not sanction private friendship. It also proves how impossible it was to forge this Epistle; abounding as it does with so many specific allusions; for these not only render detection possible, but easy. Hence Paley much avails himself of this chapter in his Horæ Paulinæ—a work of uncommon excellence; and which deals only in the argument derivable from *incidental* evidence.

—Neither is it improper to observe from it, the error of Popery. Papists say that Peter was the bishop of Rome; but had he been there, is it credible for a moment that *he* would have been overlooked by our Apostle! The probability indeed is, that he never was there. There is no evidence of it in the Scripture: and we know for what purposes of delusion it has been pretended—the Roman succession of bishops from him.

—But who can help observing how many females are mentioned here? Phebe. Priscilla. Mary. Junia. Tryphena. Tryphosa. Persis. The mother of Rufus. Julia. The sister of Nereus.—All these, with the exception of two, are not only mentioned, but commended: and these two would not have been saluted by name, unless they had been persons of religious excellence; for Paul valued no other qualities compared with this. But all the rest of these worthies have ascribed to them some attainment or service "in the Lord."

Let not, therefore, females suppose that they are cut off from usefulness, and usefulness, even in the cause of Christ. The most eminent servants of God have acknowledged their obligations to them; and ascribed no little of their success to their care and kindness. The public ministry is not indeed open to them; neither is the army or navy, or the senate: and good sense will acquiesce in the distinctions and determinations of Heaven, especially when it is seen, that they are not founded on any principle of degradation, but in the obvious proprieties of life. If they have not authority, they have influence, which is far better, and more deeply effective. Servants have blessed God for pious mistresses. Children have been prepared for the preaching of the word, and the devotion of the sanctuary, by the earlier, but important efforts of a mother. How much does even the religious public owe to the mothers of Newton and Cecil: and a thousand more; from whom the churches have derived such able ministers! To Hannah we owe a Samuel: and to Lois and Eunice, his mother and grandmother, we owe a Timothy.

They are at home in almsdeeds, like Dorcas, who made garments for the poor; and are peculiarly adapted to visit the sick and the afflicted. The wife may win the irreligious husband without the word: and fan his devotion, and give speed to his zeal, when he is in the way everlasting. Who would keep them from those public meetings where feelings are to be excited, which they will be sure to carry away, and improve at home? In a word, women have the finest heads, and hearts, and tongues, and hands, for usefulness, in the world. Who does not wish to see them always under a religious principle? Who would not have them, *appropriately*, more encouraged and employed as workers together with the servants of Christ? "Help," therefore, says the Apostle, "those women that laboured with me in the Gospel, whose names are in the book of life."

FEBRUARY 26.

"*When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it.*"—Luke xix. 41.

An ordinary mind would have been engrossed and elated by the actions and acclamations of the multitude who cut down branches from the trees and strewed them in the way; and spread their garments on the ground for him to ride upon; and filled the air with Hosannas, crying, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! But he wept—wept at the sight of Jerusalem, whose visitation was now closing, and whose judgment was hastening on—saying, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to

thy peace! but now are they hid from thine eyes."

Surely these tears teach us, that there is nothing degrading in sensibility. Indeed, all true greatness is tender and sympathetic. Jonathan and David, the heroes of the age, one of whom had slain a whole garrison, and the other Goliath, both wept, till each exceeded. Homer, that exquisite painter of Nature, considers Ulysses as excelling all men in wisdom, yet represents him as weeping three times in six lines. He describes Achilles, too, so extraordinary in courage, as weeping often and plentifully. Let not, therefore, the unfeeling pride themselves, as superior in fortitude and philosophy. Feeling is the noblest distinction and ornament of humanity: and in proportion as we lose it, we cease to be men. There is a moral ossification of the heart, as well as a physical; and the one is as pitiable as the other. He who was fairer than the children of men, was often known to weep.

As these tears were honourable, so they are exemplary. For whom did he shed them? The inhabitants of Jerusalem, who, after every kind of insult, were going to put him to death. At the grave of Lazarus he wept for friends; here, for adversaries. And does he not, by this, tell us to be tender-hearted? To weep with them that weep? That we should bewail the miseries of others? And not confine our compassion to our own connexions, but love our enemies, bless them that curse us, and do good to them that persecute us? And does he not enforce this, not only by precept, but example? And can we be his disciples, unless we follow him? "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself so to walk even as he walked!" "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

These tears are encouraging. Tears are generally considered proofs of concern. Human tears, indeed, it will be allowed, are not infallible tokens; but the tears of Christ may be safely trusted. They show his compassion; the sincerity, the greatness of his compassion. They tell us, that his love passeth knowledge: and therefore they call upon us to repair to him, assured that he is not willing that any should perish; and that he has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

Finally, they are awful and foreboding; admonishing us of the dreadfulness of their doom on whose behalf they are shed. It is affecting to see a man weep, and especially a great man. You would naturally suppose that something vast and momentous was necessary, to move to tears such mighty minds as those of a Bacon or a Newton. And could a trifle move the Son of God to weep? And if the temporal calamities coming on the Jews affected him, how much more would their eternal perdition? What were the Roman eagles, compared with the wrath to come? Oh, these tears say, plain enough, "There is something divinely, infinitely pitiable in the loss of a soul! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Who knoweth the power of his anger!"

May we not fairly infer from hence, what his feeling is in the recovery of a sinner? If he weeps over those who are ready to perish, surely he will rejoice over those that are saved. "He will rejoice over them with joy; he will rest in his love; he will rejoice over them with singing."

FEBRUARY 27.

"Increasing in the knowledge of God."
Col. i. 10.

Does this mean the knowledge of which God is the author, or the knowledge of which he is the subject? In reality, this is the same thing. The Gospel contains the knowledge which God has communicated to the children of men; and this principally discovers *himself;* so, that it is at once a revelation *from* God, and a revelation *of* him. All his works, the largest and the least, praise him. If we take up the telescope, or the microscope, we soon find reason alike to exclaim, "This is the finger of God."—But we take up the Gospel and say, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Here we look into his very heart, and see that it is the dwelling-place of pity. Here we know the thoughts he thinks towards us, and find that they are thoughts of peace, and not of evil.

With regard to this knowledge, we may make out four classes.

—Some are *destitute of this knowledge* of God. Some! There are at present more than five hundred millions lying in darkness, and the shadow of death! These have never heard of the Name of Jesus, and know not that there is such a Being in the universe. Yet Christians have it in their power to inform them: and a few are exerting themselves. Prosper, O God, their endeavours. Let thy way be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations.

—Some *reject it.* This is one of the things we should deem incredible; but we have undeniable, as well as mortifying evidence of the fact. How many refuse to hear! How many never read the word of God! Others even sneer at its inspiration, and ridicule its contents! Whatever difficulties may attend the doom of the former class, justice admits of none with regard to the second—"How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!"

Some *hold it in unrighteousness.* They profess to know God; but in works deny him. Not a few of these have clear views of the way of salvation, and even contend for the

faith once delivered to the saints. The Gospel seems to have taught them every thing, except to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow the Saviour in the regeneration. They would be offended to be placed near the former class. "We are not unbelievers." No—you have denied the faith, and are—"worse than an infidel."

—Some *receive it in the love and the influence of it.* Their faith is not a notion: their worship is not formality: their hope is not delusion. They live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit. Though these are still comparatively few, yet, blessed be God, their number is daily and greatly enlarging; and the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred-fold!

Art thou, my reader, one of them? Remember four things.

That thou hast *any* of this knowledge—should make thee thankful.

That thou hast *so little*—should make thee humble.

That more is *attainable*—should encourage thy hope.

That it is attainable only in *the use of means*—should awaken thy diligence.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

FEBRUARY 28.

"*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*"—John xiii. 1.

These words refer immediately to the twelve disciples of our Lord. But what said he in his intercessory prayer? "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." And what part of the statement before us will not extend beyond his first followers?

Is it the *relation?* These are called "His own"—and they were indeed his own, by extraordinary office; but they were far more importantly his own, by saving grace. And thus he has a propriety in all Christians. If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed. They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh. He has a peculiar right to them, from covenant donation, and the execution of his trust. They were given him as so many sheep to feed; as so many scholars to teach; as so many patients to heal; as so many captives to redeem. They are therefore not their own, but bought with a price: and the ransom was no less than his own blood. The connexion between Him and them is so intimate and entire, that they are called his heritage, his children, his bride; the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones: yea, they are joined to the Lord, and of one spirit with him.

Is it the *condition?* They "were in the world." He was leaving it, and they were to be left in it: and from what it had been to him, they could judge what it would be to them: according to his own intimation, "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." They found themselves, therefore, as lilies among thorns; as sheep among wolves. And he prayed not to have them taken out of the world, but only kept from the evil. And thus it is with his people now. They are in the world; and this is their field of action; and this is their sphere of duty and trial for a season. There they are to serve their generation; there they are to glorify God, by doing and suffering his will. The world has advanced much in science and civilization; but it retains the same disposition towards real godliness as formerly: and is more perilous in its smiles than in its frowns; in its treacherous embraces than in its avowed hostilities. But if you are "His own," while you are "in the world," you will not be of it; and He, whose you are, will not only keep you from falling, but render you useful in it, and bring you honourably out of it—Be of good cheer, says He, I have overcome the world.

Is it the *reality of his regard?* "*He had loved* his own which were in the world." What other principle could have actuated him in selecting them? Calling them? Informing them? Employing them? Adopting them? Honouring them? Blessing them with his constant intimacy? They had not chosen him, but he had chosen them, and ordained them, that they should go and bring forth fruit. He treated them not as servants, but as friends; and all things that he had heard of the Father, he made known unto them. He could say, as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you. And is not this true of all his people? Who said, deliver them from going down into the pit? Who bore their sins in his own body on the tree? Who shut the mouth of hell? Who opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers?—O Christian, who sought thee? And who saved thee? Whatever you are, whatever you have, is the effect of the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge.

Is it the *permanency of this affection? Having* loved his own which were in the world, he *loved them unto the end.* They tried him, and proved themselves very unworthy of his continued attachment. Yet he bore with their dulness and imperfections. He chided and reproved them indeed; but this was not only compatible with his constancy, but resulted from it: for as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens: and faithful are the wounds of this friend. And now we see him at the last, all alive to their welfare; teaching and comforting them; washing their feet, and praying for them. In the garden, when he found them sleeping, he extenuated the infirmity. The spirit indeed is

willing, but the flesh is weak. When he surrendered himself to his enemies, he stipulated for their exemption. Let these go their way. He died with them in his heart. He rose and appeared to them; and though they had all forsaken him and fled in the hour of trial, he said, Be not afraid, Peace be to you. He laid his hands upon them, and while he blessed them, he was taken up into heaven. And did he forget them then? He sent them another Comforter that should abide with them for ever. And was this peculiar to them? He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He rests in his love. He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. A true friend loveth at all times. There are indeed few such friends to be found. But he abideth faithful. Job's brethren proved like a summer's brook. One told David in his distress, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. At my first answer, no one, says Paul, stood by me, but all men forsook me: but he adds, nevertheless the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me. So will it be with all those who trust in him: "They shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."

"This God is the God we adore,
Our faithful unchangeable friend:
Whose love is as great as his power;
And neither knows measure nor end
'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home:
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that 's to come."

MARCH 1.

"*And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*" Numb. x. 32.

While this invitation is founded in benevolence, it also displays humility. Christians are convinced, that *they* can only give according as they have received. But, from God's communications to them, they know that they *can* be useful, and that they *ought* to be useful to others. They never receive grace for themselves only. If the glory of the Lord has risen upon them, they are to arise and shine. If they are converted, they are to strengthen their brethren. If they are comforted, they are to comfort those who are in any trouble. If they are rich in this world, they are to do good, and be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate—"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."—Hence, says Moses to Hobab, "If thou go with us, what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee."

—And he repeats the assurance: "It shall be—yea, it shall be." And was it not so? Did he repent of his adhering to Israel? See what is said in Judges, and in Samuel, of his descendants. And was Obed-edom a loser by the ark? Did not the sacred guest more than pay for its entertainment? "It was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God." Who is likely to be injured by casting in his lot with the followers of the Lamb? Will his family suffer? Many a wretch has reduced his wife and children to penury and ruin by his vices; but every principle of a good man will lead him to provide for his own: and the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Will his substance? The play-house, the ale-house, the gaming-house, the house of her who lives in the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, will injure a man much more than the House of God. Will his health? Is *this* likely to be injured, or benefited by temperance, and calm temper, and cheerful confidence, and benevolent feelings? Religion must befriend reputation, as it produces and guards all the elements from which it is derived: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Therefore, come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. We cannot promise you great things in the world: but the Lord will bless your bread and your water: and a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. We cannot promise you exemptions from affliction; but nothing shall befall you but what is common to man: and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, and will with the temptation, also make a way for your escape. We cannot secure you from privations and sacrifices; but we can promise, that you shall be more than indemnified for every thing you do, or lose, or suffer, for the cause of God. He will not be unrighteous, to forget your work of faith and labour of love. A cup of cold water, given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose its reward. "There is no man," saith the Saviour, "that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." We can assure you, that if you travel with us, you shall feed on the manna, and drink of the rock, and be guided by the cloud, and behold the glory of the Lord in the Wilderness: and then you shall share with us, beyond Jordan, in the land flowing with milk and honey. How blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven! who have peace with God! who are delivered from the sting of a guilty conscience, and the torment of fear! who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost! who rejoice in hope! who know that death is their friend, and heaven their home! who have

their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life! "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

Lord! I have often heard this invitation—I now accept it. I am a companion of them that fear Thee, and of them that keep thy precepts. "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."

MARCH 2.

"*But Peter followed him afar off.*"
Matt. xxvi. 58.

This, too, was better than forsaking him, and fleeing, as the rest did. Here was the working of some degree of principle. Here was some love to the Saviour, or he would not have followed him at all. It was the lingering of that affection which may be seemingly smothered in the Christian, but can never be extinguished; and will soon be blown again into a flame.

But he was overcome by fear. His Lord was apprehended, and going to be tried and crucified. What if I, said Peter, should be found in the same doom as one of them! The fear of man bringeth a snare. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life.

Yet this was very unbelieving in him. He had seen his Lord's miracles, and knew what he could do. He knew that he had actually stipulated for their release in the garden, as the condition of his own surrender. He knew that he had assured them, that after he was risen from the dead, he would appear to them, and employ them as his witnesses; which involved their preservation. What a difference between Peter and Paul—Paul, who said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." And between Peter and Luther—Luther, who, when informed of his dangers, said, If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the roofs of the houses, I would go—But Peter followed him afar off!

This was also very ungrateful. The Saviour had done much for him. He had healed, by a miracle, his wife's mother—He had called him to the Apostleship, the highest honour on earth—He had singularly distinguished him with James and John on several occasions—He had saved him by his grace, and enlightened him from above, and—was now going to suffer and die for him. And a friend is born for adversity. Then, instead of keeping at a distance from us, we look for his attendance and sympathy. Peter could have unequivocally testified in favour of suffering innocence; but he hangs off! And Patience itself complains, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none!"

All this, too, was in violation of his own profession and vows—that he was willing to follow him to prison and to death—that he would die with him rather than deny him—and all this had scarcely left his lips—and was uttered just after our Saviour had so solemnly forewarned him—Yet Peter followed him afar off.

This led to something worse; and I wonder not at the sequel. His after-conduct in denying him; and thrice; and swearing with oaths and curses; was only the continuance and the increase of his present reluctance. So it is: the way of error and sin is always down-hill; and once in motion, who can tell where a man will stop? You follow him afar off this hour, the next you are ashamed of him. You trifle with the Sabbath to-day to-morrow you profane it. You now endure evil company; you will soon choose it. So true is it—"They proceed from evil to evil."

And yet, who of us can cast a stone at him? Are not we verily guilty as well as Peter? Let us see whether, though as yet we have not begun to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, we have not been following him afar off. Here let us not depend upon the opinion of our fellow-creatures; we may stand fair with them: but what do they know of us? of our inward state? of our principles and motives? What says the *heart?* "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." Yet even on this testimony we must not absolutely rely—"*God* is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things." The Laodiceans were satisfied with themselves at the very time when He charged them with every one of the evils from which they supposed themselves free. Has *He* not somewhat against us? May we not continue to read and hear his word, and keep our places in the sanctuary, and even at his table; and yet feel very little of that sacred fervour and delight that once accompanied our devotions? Attendance upon the Saviour in the means of grace is very distinguishable from spiritual worship. We may draw nigh to him with our mouth, and honour him with our lips, while the heart is far from him. Does the *heart* lag behind? Then are we following him afar off.

His people are himself. He that receiveth them receiveth him: and what we do not! to the least of all his brethren, we do not to him. In the distance of our regard to them; and especially in our backwardness to notice and relieve and visit the poor and afflicted; are we not following him afar off?

Above all, does not the evil appear in the

remoteness of our resemblance? We are commanded to follow him; and our conformity to him is essential to all religion; and we may always judge of the degree, as well as the reality of our religion, by it. How far short of the model do we come? How distantly do we resemble that condescension, which washed the disciples' feet; that self-denial, which led him to please not himself; that fervour which induced him to say, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; that delight in obedience, which enabled him to acknowledge, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work—

And thus, by our negligence and indifference, we grieve his Holy Spirit. And thus we rob our own souls. For he is all in all. He is the fountain of life; and it is good for us to draw *near* to him. But when we follow him afar off, we cannot see him; and hear him; and converse with him. And woe unto us if trouble befalls us, or the enemy meets with us—and he is most likely to do so then, or death assails us, when we are absent from him.

Let me *sigh*—

> "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
> Prone to leave the God I love."

And let me *sing*—

> "Thou Shepherd of Israel divine,
> The joy of the upright in heart,
> For closer communion I pine,
> Still, still to reside where Thou art.
>
> 'Tis there I would alway abide,
> Nor ever a moment depart;
> Preserved evermore by thy side—
> Eternally hid in thy heart.

MARCH 3.

"*Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.*"
Rom. iii. 4.

But cannot God be true, and man be true also? Does the veracity of the one infer the falsehood of the other? Not absolutely; but in particular instances. There may be, and there often is, an opposition between their testimony: and when this is the case, we are not to hesitate a moment by whose claims we shall be decided—If the whole world was on one side, and He on the other—Let God be true, but every man a liar. And, comparatively, the credibility of the one, must always be nothing to that of the other. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. And this will appear undeniable from four admissions.

The first regards the ignorance of man, and the wisdom of God. Man is fallible. He not only may err, but he is likely to err. He may be deceived by outward appearances; by the reports of others; by his own reasonings. His powers are limited; his researches, in every direction, are soon checked; there are depths which he cannot fathom, heights which he cannot scale, complications which he cannot unravel. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. How much of it is mere opinion and conjecture! With what follies have the greatest minds been charged! Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolishness the wisdom of this world? But His understanding is infinite. He knows all things. He cannot be mistaken.

The second regards the mutability of man, and the unchangeableness of God. Creatures, from their very being, are mutable. Many of the angels kept not their first estate. Adam fell from his original condition. Who needs to be told, that man never continues in one stay? New views gender new feelings, and these new pursuits. What pleases to-day may offend to-morrow. Many are unstable as water. No one is unchangeable. But God changes not. What he thinks now of any subject he always thought, and always will think; for with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

The third regards the weakness of man, and the all-sufficiency of God. Man may threaten in fury, but be unable to execute. He may promise sincerely; and his promises be vain words—he *cannot* fulfil them. In this respect he is not always to be judged of by his conduct. There are cases in which we censure, when, if we knew all, we should only pity. The man struggles with difficulties which have unexpectedly come upon him; and yields to dire necessity; and provides things honest in the sight of the Lord—who has seen all his heart and his hardships—though not in the sight of men. But God is almighty. He who made and upholds all things by the word of his power, speaks every thing, in the Scriptures.

The fourth regards the depravity of man, and the rectitude of God. Man goes astray, from the womb, speaking lies. He often knowingly deceives. It is his aim and study; and he rejoices in his success. Even men who are influenced by religious principles, may be overcome of evil, and occasion our saying, Lord, what is man! How far from truth was the sentiment of Jonah—"I do well to be angry, even unto death." How lamentable was the falsehood of Abraham, when he said to his wife, She is my sister! How dreadful was the perjury of Peter, when he swore, "I know not the man!" But God is holiness itself. He is incapable of a wrong bias—he cannot be tempted to deceive.

When, therefore, we look at man—ignorant and fallible—varying according to his excitements—often unable to make good his engagements—yea, accessible to the influence of evil motives: and then contemplate God, in all the glories of his wisdom, immutability, almightiness, and rectitude—each being an everlasting and infinite preservative of truth—who can view these competitors for

our belief, and not join with the Apostle—"Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar."

The use to which this fact should be applied, is to reduce our confidence in man, and increase our confidence in God.

And yet the reverse of this is our practice. We yield where we should be cautious, and we hesitate where it is impossible for us to err. We turn from the Rock of ages, and lean on the broken reed. What is the consequence? "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

Let us cease, then, from man. Not that we are to become universally suspicious, and suppose that there is no sincerity in the world. It was David's error to say in his haste, All men are liars. And when the Scripture says, There is no faithfulness in them: men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; it must be taken with qualification. Yet instances of inflexible integrity are not abundant. And we should not implicitly rely upon any one, especially in divine things. Let us respect great and good men, but not be enslaved by them. Let us not pin our faith to the sleeve of any authority merely human. Let us suffer no man to have dominion over our conscience; always searching the Scriptures to see whether these things are so in the word of truth.

For God is entitled to our absolute confidence. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Let us trust him as he deserves. Let us always place a ready and unshaken reliance on his Word. Let God be true, in its doctrines; and let us receive them, however mysterious. Let God be true, in its threatenings; and let us flee from the wrath to come. Let God be true, in its promises; and let us be strong in faith, giving glory to God. YEA, LET GOD BE TRUE, BUT EVERY MAN A LIAR. Let God be true in its predictions; and whatever difficulties stand in the way, believe that the whole earth shall be filled with his glory.

MARCH 4.

"*All his saints are in thy hand.*"
Deut. xxxiii. 3.

THESE *holy ones* are distinguished by many things from each other. Some of them are in public life and some in private. Some are rich and some poor. Some are young and some old—But all are equally dear to God; and partakers of the common salvation; in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. They pass under various denominations among men: and these too often keep them at a distance from each other, and lead them to mistake and censure each other: and often they would seem to wish to draw *Him* along with them, and confine his influences within their respective exclusiveness. But no. He owns them *all*. They are all children of the same family, and going to the same temple to worship; and however they may differ in dress, or age, or stature, they all stand in the same relation to each other, and to himself. Some of them are strong, and others are weak in faith. He has in his fold lambs as well as sheep; and in his family babes as well as young men. But a bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench, but will bring forth judgment unto victory. This honour have *all* his saints—"*All* his saints are in thy hand."

—In his fashioning hand. They are the clay, and he is the potter, and he makes them vessels of honour, prepared unto every good work. He fearfully and wonderfully made them as creatures. But they are his workmanship by another and a nobler creation—"This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise."

—In his preserving hand. For now they are precious, they are the more exposed. They are called a crown and a diadem; and the powers of darkness would gladly seize it: but observe where it is placed for security: "Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God"—and there they are safe, perfectly safe: safe, not owing to their strength, but to their situation. By another image the Saviour establishes the same confidence. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

—In his guiding hand. To lead a blind man, you take him in your hand—thus the Lord leads his people. *He* knoweth the way that they take; but *they* do not. I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. You take a little child in your hand to lead him. Though God, says Bishop Hall, has a large family, none of his children are able to go alone: they are too weak, as well as too ignorant. But fear not, says God: I

will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

—In his chastening hand. They are sometimes alarmed at their afflictions, and cry, Do not condemn me—as if they were in the hand of an enemy—but he is their father; and not like fathers of our flesh; for they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Luther therefore said, Strike on, Lord, strike on; for now I know I am thy child. We deserve to lose the rod, and by our improper behaviour we forfeit all claim to his correction; and we may well wonder and exclaim, Lord, what is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him, that thou shouldest visit him every morning and try him every moment? But he does not deal with us according to our desert. And therefore, rather than leave us to make flesh our arm, or the world our portion, he will remove every stay of support, and dry up every spring of comfort. But he does not afflict willingly. If needs be only, we are in heaviness: and when we mourn our faults, the rod drops upon the ground, and he hastens to wipe away our tears. "Is Ephraim my dear son! is he a pleasant child! for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Whatever, therefore, Christians have to distress and perplex, here is enough to comfort and to satisfy them; "For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works—are IN THE HAND OF GOD."

MARCH 5.

"*So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*" Rom. vii. 25.

So ends this chapter, concerning which there has been much dispute. For some have contended that the Apostle does not here speak of himself; but personates another. They suppose that he refers to a Jew—under the Law, but not under Grace—awakened, but not renewed—convinced, but not converted.

Yet can any unregenerate person, with truth, say—not only, "I consent to the law that it is good;" but, "With my mind I serve the law of God!" and, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man?"—an expression of godliness that characterized the very temper of the Messiah himself. *He* could say nothing more than this—"I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

At first view, the language of complaint may seem much too strong to apply to the experience of a real Christian. But what real Christian would find it too much to utter—when placed in the same state, and occupied in the same way, with the Apostle? That is—viewing himself before a God, in whose light the very heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly; and who sees more pollution in our duties, than we ever see in our sins—That is, comparing himself with the rule of all rectitude, the Divine Law, whose spirituality is such as to extend to the thoughts and the desires of the mind, as well as the actions of the life, and which considers anger as murder, and the lust of the eye as adultery. What must the highest attainments of mortals be, compared with this absolutely perfect standard of holiness! yea, or even with the elevated and vast desires of a renewed soul!

We need not wonder that many are astonished and perplexed here. "The spiritual judgeth all things; but he himself is judged of no man." They who are strangers to the warfare in which he is engaged can never clearly comprehend his language, or enter into those feelings which produce such a depth of confession and abasement. Those who have never been in the field, may be surprised at many things related by a veteran, in describing the campaigns he has passed through; but his old scar-worn comrade can attest the truth of them. In religious matters, more than in any other, the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. But the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.

We allow that this chapter has been much perverted. There is no part of the Bible that Antinomians so much delight in, or which ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness so often quote. Such persons wrest also the *other* Scriptures to their own destruction. And are we to argue against the use of a thing from the abuse of it! What good thing is not abused! Yet we do not refuse raiment to the naked, because there are some who glory in what ought to remind us of our shame: or food to the hungry, because some make a god of their belly. And shall we refuse to sincere and humble souls, mourning over the evils of their own heart, the instruction and consolation here provided for them, for fear the interpretation should be applied to an improper purpose! No one, really taught of God, *will* abuse it; nor *can* he be more reconciled to his corruptions, or more satisfied with his deficiencies, in consequence of being able to adopt the language as his own.

For shall they continue in sin that grace may abound! God forbid. How can they who are dead to sin, live any longer therein!

We are not to make sad the hearts of God's people, but to comfort them—for the joy of the Lord is their strength. And only the last day will show how much this section of Scripture has strengthened the weak hands and confirmed the feeble knees of those who were deeming their experience peculiar, and concluding that they had no part with the Israel of God—till they heard Paul bewailing and encouraging himself thus—For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I MYSELF serve the Law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

MARCH 6.

"*Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.*"—Deut. i. 21.

WE may, and we ought, to transfer what is here said to the Jews concerning Canaan, to ourselves, with regard to a better country, that is, a heavenly: for the one was designed to be typical of the other.

Observe the exhibition: "Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee." Where? In the Scriptures. Not in its full development, for so it is a glory to *be* revealed, for it doth not *yet* appear what we shall be; but in its general nature; and in a way adapted to our present apprehensions; and likely to take hold of our mind. Hence so many figures are employed: all of which aid our conceptions, while they fall short of the subject.

But does he place it before our eyes to tantalize us, by awakening our notice, and drawing forth our admiration, and exciting our desire, when the boon is not within our reach?

Observe the command: "Go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee." This supposes it to be attainable: yea, it makes the attainment our duty. Our missing it, is not only our misery, but our crime. We shall be punished for neglecting so great salvation. It is our guilt—the guilt of the vilest disobedience to the most gracious authority: for he not only allows, but he enjoins us to seek first his kingdom and righteousness—and commands us to believe on the Name of his Son Jesus Christ. Are we doing *this?* For *He* is the way: and we come *unto God by him.*

Observe the encouragement: "Fear not, neither be discouraged." To this we are liable on two accounts. First. By a sense of our unworthiness. The greatness of the blessedness, when combined with a sense of our desert, astonishes the mind into a kind of incredulity; and makes hope seem no better than presumption. But every thing here is free, and designed to show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. We are as welcome as we are unworthy. Why then should we refuse to be comforted? —Secondly. By a sense of our weakness. Who is sufficient for the distance, the difficulties, the dangers? The Jews were dismayed by the report of the spies. The towns, said they, are walled up to heaven. There are the Anakims; in whose sight *we* were but as grasshoppers. The people were disheartened.

But, said Caleb, "Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are able." Did he mean without God? No. But with him; with him as their leader—and keeper—and this he had promised. And is he not with you? Has he not said, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness?" We cannot be too sensible of our weakness; but let us remember that his grace is sufficient for us. Has it not been sufficient for all those who have gone before us?

> "Once they were mourning here below
> And wet their couch with tears:
> They wrestled hard, as we do now,
> With sins, and doubts, and fears."

But their fears were vain. They overcame. They are now more than conquerors through him who loved them.

—But Jordan rolls between. So was it with the Jews; and it was even overflowing its banks at the time. But the ark divided the waters. They went through dry-shod. And their enemies were as still as a stone—till they were clean passed over—and the land was all their own.

MARCH 7.

"*I have called you friends.*"—John xv. 15.

WHAT condescension, and kindness, and grace, are here! For these must be the principles of this friendship, whether we consider his greatness, or our meanness and unworthiness. Lord, what is *man*, that *Thou* art mindful of him! and the *son* of man, that *Thou* visitest him? Yet he *is* mindful of us; he *does* visit us—yea, he calls us his FRIENDS. And names and things, professions and realities, are the same with him. If he calls us friends, he will treat us accordingly; and we may expect from him whatever the most perfect friendship can insure.

For instance. He will honour us with his confidence—the very thing he here mentions, —"Henceforth, I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth:

but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." A servant is entrusted, not with secrets, but orders; and he is seldom informed of the reasons, even of these. Turning him into a confidant, is one of the ways to exemplify Solomon's observation: "He that delicately bringeth up a servant, shall have him for his son at length;" and he will take greater liberties than a child. There is, indeed, respect due to a servant; but it is respect of another kind. We do not like a master or mistress who disdains speaking to a domestic, unless in the language of menace or authority—But good sense will find out a happy medium between distance and fondness; between haughtiness, and a familiarity that inspires no deference. But unreserved confidence is for friends. Nothing is concealed between them. Abraham is called the friend of God: and, says God, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I shall do?" How did our Lord unbosom himself to his disciples! To you, said he, is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. When he was alone, he expounded all things unto them; he manifested himself to them, and not unto the world. And so now; the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.

If he calls us friends, he will give us freedom of access to him. The distance and ceremonies, which may be necessary to regulate the approach of others, are laid aside with a friend; the heart, the arms, the house, are all open to him. And does the Lord keep us at a distance? All his language is invitation—"Come unto me." He allows us to come even to his seat; and to enter into the secret of his pavilion. He permits us, at all times, to spread our most minute affairs before him: yea, he indulges us to live in his house, to sit at his table, to walk with him, to lean upon his bosom—Such honour have all his saints.

—If he calls us friends, he will reprove us. Whenever friendship is founded on proper principle, reproof will be one of its chief duties, and privileges too. Faithful are the wounds of a friend: and so David valued them—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." Moses makes the omission the proof of hatred—"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." But the Saviour will never incur this reproach: As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

—If he calls us friends, he will counsel us. There are passages in the life of every man sufficient to confound a single understanding. But how pleasing is it, in doubts and perplexities, to fetch in aid from the judgment or experience of another, and who is concerned for our welfare! But He is "*The* Counsellor." "Counsel, says he, "is *mine*, and sound wisdom." He is a light to them that sit in darkness. He is a dissolver of doubts. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way—and they that follow it will find it to be pleasantness and peace.

—If he calls us friends, he will sympathize with us. There is no true friendship unless we make the pleasures and the pains of our connexions our own; rejoicing when they rejoice, and weeping when they weep. To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed from his friend. The natural language of the sufferer is, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me!" Hence the complaint of the Saviour—"I looked for some to take pity, and there was none; and for comforter, but I found none"—for even all the disciples forsook him, and fled. But he will never inflict, what he endured. In all our affliction he is afflicted. To exemplify this, he assumed our nature. He became a man—to be a friend. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is also able to succour those that are tempted. And, therefore, though he is passed into the heavens, we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Yea, "He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye."

—If he calls us friends, he will afford us assistance and succour. And this is the grand test of friendship. A friend loveth at all times; but is born for adversity; and *he* has forfeited all claim to the character, who says, in the hour of application, Go in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled, while he gives not the things that are needful! Yet, how often is this the case! How often are the words of Solomon verified—"Confidence in an unfaithful man in the time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint!" Many are very friendly when you want not their aid; especially while you are imparting, instead of receiving. You are their garden: they walk in it in summer, but abandon it in winter—then it has no flowers or fruits. You are their scaffold: they build with you—but when the work is done, they take you down, and lay you aside. But though the Saviour will never leave us nor forsake us, he has emphatically said, I will be with you in trouble. And his people have always found him a present help, when every other resource has failed. Some may really feel for us, but be unable to help us. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. Even in death he will be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.

Thus he treats his friends—How do they treat him? Have we never given him cause

to say, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Have we never betrayed a want of confidence in him? Have we never been ashamed of him? Never denied him before men? Never preferred our own ease and honour to his cause and glory? We can never make him adequate returns for his goodness. But have we made him suitable returns? Rather, will not an honest review of our temper and conduct constrain us to blush and say—

"O were I not most vile and base,
I could not thus my friend requite;
And were not he the God of grace,
He'd frown, and spurn me from his sight."

MARCH 8.

"*Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.*" Psalm xxxiii. 18.

This is a very encouraging character. They who cannot claim the higher distinctions of religion, may surely know that they "fear God, and hope in his mercy."

Some may wonder at the combination; and suppose that the qualities are incompatible with each other. But the first Christians "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost." They may think that the fear will injure the hope, or the hope the fear. But these are even mutually hopeful: and they are, not only never so beautiful, but never so influential, as when they are blended. The fear promotes hope, by the evidence it affords; and by keeping us from loose and careless walking—which must always affect our peace and pleasure. And hope no less befriends this fear. For never is God seen so glorious, so worthy of all our devotedness to him, as when we hope in his mercy; and even the more assured we are of his regard, the more we shall inquire, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?—The more we shall tremble at the thought of offending and grieving him: the more we shall continue upon our knees, praying, Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, *my* Strength, and *my* Redeemer. It is called "a lively hope:" and Christians know, by experience, that upon all their principles and duties it has the same influence as the spring has upon the fields and the gardens.

Despondence of mind has the same effect upon our feelings and obedience as frost upon the stream: it chills, hardens, and stagnates. But Divine love dissolves the ice, and the waters flow.

God is a Spirit, and has none of our senses and members; but in speaking to us, he makes use of language that we can understand.—His *eyes* are upon them that fear him, and hope in his mercy.

—The eyes of his *knowledge* are upon them. Every thing in their affairs comes under his notice. He knows all their walking through this great wilderness. Nothing befalls them without their Heavenly Father. Parents cannot always have their eye upon a child. They may be engaged, they may be afar off, they may be asleep. But he is always at hand: He is never diverted or perplexed; He never slumbers or sleeps.

—The eyes of his *affection* are upon them. The eye not only affecteth the heart, but follows it. It turns with the object of attachment; it sparkles with delight while dwelling upon it; and when deprived of the sight, continues looking in the direction of departure—as the disciples stood gazing up towards heaven after their beloved Saviour. Oh! to be the object of God's love! To be precious in his sight, and honourable! But He "takes pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." "He will rest in his love: He will joy over them with singing."

—The eyes of his *providence* are upon them. Therefore it is added—"To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." That is—for a part is put for the whole—to secure them from all danger, and to supply all their wants. In cases the most perilous and extreme, He is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all they can ask or think. We are not to look for miracles; but it is only because the power and truth of God can do without them.

"For sooner all nature shall change,
Than one of God's promises fail.

"How safe and how happy are they
Who on the good Shepherd rely!
He gives them out strength for their day,
Their wants He will surely supply.
He ravens and lions can tame;
All creatures obey his command:
Then let me rejoice in his Name,
And leave all my cares in his hand."

MARCH 9.

"*Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*—Ephes. vi. 10.

To this we must be brought. Nature can never do the work of grace. Reason cannot be a substitute for faith. Education cannot render needless the teaching of the Spirit. Vain must all our exertions be, without his agency. Without his influence we may have the form of godliness, but not the power; we may be reformed, but not renewed; we may become other creatures, but not new ones.

What is the use we are to make of this admission? Are we to derive from it ease in sin? self-justification? excuses for indolence? reasons for despair? Self-despair, indeed, grows out of it: but no other. There is hope in Israel concerning this thing. We *have* a resource; and it is *accessible:* and we are commanded to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

When we plead for this doctrine, we are often charged with enthusiasm. But the Scripture asserts, that we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus; that it is God who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure; that hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.—And we retort the charge upon those that would exclude this influence. For what is enthusiasm, but visionary hope; groundless expectation? And what can be more delusive, than looking for an end without suitable and adequate means? a mighty effect, without a more powerful cause? a practice, the most alien from our depraved nature, without a divine principle? a gathering of grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles? And this is the case with those who deny the operations of that grace which is alone sufficient for us. We allow that we draw the character of the Christian high; and expect from him great things: that he should be renewed in the spirit of his mind; that he should walk by faith, and not by sight; that he should overcome the world; and have his conversation in Heaven.—But we have means answerable to all this. We have a principle adequate to the practice. We have a cause far superior to all these grand results. We allow that the work of a Christian, as it is described in the Bible, looks fitter for an angel than for a fallen weak man; but this fallen weak man has more than the sufficiency of an angel for the discharge of it—his sufficiency is of God!

Such a discovery, such an assurance is necessary. We are depraved creatures, and we cannot be ignorant of it. We have inward repugnances to spiritual duties. We are surrounded with outward difficulties. On the side of sin there is number, example, constant solicitation. Our slothful heart cries, "There is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets"—With all this known and felt, who could enter a religious course with pleasure or vigour, without the certainty of effectual aid? Possibility, probability, is not enough. Mere hope is not enough. Our hands hang down, our knees tremble, our very souls are chilled, unless we have a full and express persuasion, that God will be with us and bear us through. And here, therefore, he meets us, and says, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Rely on me. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. I can enlighten the darkest understanding. I can turn the heart of stone to flesh—Take hold of my strength, and be more than a conqueror—I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

At the sound of this animation, every thing revives in me, like vegetation at the call of spring. I am filled with confidence and courage—weak in myself, I am strong in another—and almighty in the God of my salvation.

And is it not better for me, that I should be a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat, than have no reasons for calling upon God—being able to do without him? Is it not better for me to depend upon the God of all grace, for the continual supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, than to have a fund of my own? The sufficiency lodged in me, must have been limited and finite; but in the Lord Jehovah I have everlasting strength. I could not trust in my own heart—but I can rely on his word, I can never be so willing to supply myself, as he is ready to succour me.

"Though in ourselves we have no stock;
The Lord is nigh to save;
The door flies open when we knock,
And 'tis but ask and have."

MARCH 10.

"*Will a man rob God?*"—Mal. iii. 8.

—Is it probable? Is it possible?

Can he be so disingenuous? What! rob a father, a friend, a benefactor! The best of all fathers! The kindest of all friends! The most generous of all benefactors!

Can he be so daring?—To rob a Being so high and sacred: and whose glory so enhances the offence! To injure a fellow-subject is felony, but to injure the king is treason. To steal from a man is injustice; but to steal from God is sacrilege. The wretch adds profaneness to violence when he breaks, not into a house, but a temple, and takes off things dedicated to the service of the Deity.

Can he be so irrational!—To rob a Being, not when he is absent, for he never is absent; but when he is present—not in the night, but in the day; and darkness and light are both alike to him—not when he sees not, observes not, but while he is looking on, and *must* look on—for his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his goings!

Can he be so desperate!—To rob one who can, who will punish; and whose wrath is not only unavoidable, but intolerable? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

Yet says God—and he cannot be mistaken: or accuse unrighteously—"Ye have robbed *me*." But on whom falls the charge? A Pharaoh only, who would not let the people go? a Nebuchadnezzar, who carried away the vessels of the Sanctuary? a Belshazzar, who profaned them! an Ananias and a Sapphira, who kept back part of the property they had sold? a Herod, who beheaded John; or a Nero, who slew Paul? Alas! the criminals are less obvious characters, and are found much nearer home—they are to be found in our own houses—they are to be found in the house of God!

Who has not robbed God of *property*? Our

wealth is not our own. We are only stewards. It always looks suspicious when a gentleman's steward becomes very rich, and dies affluent. It is even so with professors of religion. It would be better for them to die *comparatively* poor; it would be better for their reputation; it would be better for their relations. A little, honestly obtained, would be better than a large accumulation embezzled from God; it would be more sweet; it would be more efficient. Substance is intrusted to its occupiers, for certain purposes plainly laid down in the Scripture; and the providence of God is perpetually calling upon you for it. Do you discharge these claims? or do you alienate from them, by hoarding or extravagance? How much do some *unjustly* expend; in table-luxuries, in costly dress, in magnificent furniture? And they are fond of displaying these. They have little reason —They glory in their shame. These are all robberies. They are purloined from God's cause, or God's poor.

Who has not robbed God of *time?* The *Sabbath* he expressly claims for himself, and it is called the Lord's Day. Have we not often robbed him of much of this—perhaps of all—by worldly accounts, by evil company, by idle visits, by doing our own ways and finding our own pleasures? *Youth* is the morning, the spring of life: it is our best season, and therefore God has a right to it, and calls upon us to remember his demands. But have we not partially, or wholly robbed him of these days: have we not squandered them away in vanity, folly, and vice? *All* our moments and opportunities are his; and he commands us to redeem the time. But who lays to heart the brevity and uncertainty of life? Who values it as "the day of salvation?" Who seizes it as the only season of usefulness? Who rises early?

> "Where is that thrift, that avarice of time,
> (O glorious avarice!) thought of death inspires?"

Where is *He* in all our ways, who said, "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work?"

Who has not robbed him of the *heart?* This was made for him; and he demands it —"My son, give me thine heart." But the fear of the heart, the confidence of the heart, the gratitude of the heart, the attachment of the heart—we have transferred to the creature from the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore.

And may not the same be said of our *talents*—of our learning! of our powers of conversation? of our retentiveness of memory? of our influence over others?

Let us not affect to deny the charge, and ask, as the accused here did, Wherein have we robbed thee? But let us repair to the footstool of Mercy, and cry, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?"

"But there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared: and with him there is plenteous redemption:" And we may, and we ought to approach him with the encouragement of hope. But this hope must be founded on his own invitations and promises. It must bring us "unto God *by Him*," who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." To pray to God to save such creatures in any other way, is to disobey his dearest command. It is to affront and insult him, by beseeching him to be untrue and unrighteous; to frustrate his grace, and to make Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. But in him he can be just, and yet the justifier. He can redeem Jacob, and glorify himself in Israel.

We shall also be turned away from all our iniquity: for he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy. We shall also sorsow after a godly sort; and instead of complaining of any of the methods of his grace and providence, we shall cheerfully acquiesce in them all—and remember, and be confounded, and never open our mouth more, because of our shame, when He is pacified towards us for all that we have done.

MARCH 11.

"*I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord.*"—Isaiah lxiii. 7.

THERE are three ways in which we should resolve to do this.

We should mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord to *others.* We should do this in a way of conversation. "Let no corrupt communication," says the Apostle, "proceed out of your mouth." Where there is nothing immoral or indecent, there may yet be much that is trifling and vain: he therefore adds, "But that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." And here is a subject for discourse, not only innocent, but profitable: a *saying*, not only faithful, but worthy of all acceptation; and such as Moses and Elias would delight to join in, were they in company with us. We should also mention them to others, in a way of recommendation. Some are convinced of sin, and ready to despair; and nothing but the exceeding riches of divine grace can keep them from it. And some are seeking happiness where we know they can never find it. Let us, therefore, say to them, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." This, coming from our own experience, and enforced by our own example, may save a soul from death. Espe-

cially, too, if we can bear a *final* testimony to the truth, and say, with the departing Henry, "You have heard the dying words of many—These are mine: I have found a life of communion with Christ the happiest life in the world."

—We should also mention the lovingkindnesses of God to *ourselves*. There is such a thing as self-converse; and would God it were more common! It is said, fools talk much to themselves; but wise men will talk more. David enjoins this: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." And he also was an example of it: "I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search." Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me. Hence he chides his own soul: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Are you discouraged by your unworthiness, and the greatness of your guilt? Bring before your minds the freeness and the fulness of his mercy, and his lovingkindnesses to others, who had no more claim upon him than yourselves. Are you in trouble? Recall his goodness in former difficulties; and say, O my desponding soul!

> "Did ever trouble yet befall,
> And he refuse to hear thy call?
> And has he not his promise pass'd,
> That thou shalt overcome at last?"

Mention them also to yourselves, to excite you to imitation. Has he been so ready to forgive; and has he daily loaded me with his benefits? and shall I, O my soul, be implacable and uncharitable? Let me be a follower of God. Let me be merciful, even as my Father who is in heaven is merciful.

—We should mention his lovingkindnesses to *God* himself, in the various exercises of devotion—In expostulating with him: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?"—In pleading with him. If we fill our mouth with arguments, they must be fetched from his own goodness: "For thy Name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."—In praying for ourselves: "Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."—In interceding for others—the conversion of our kindred, the salvation of sinners, the prosperity of the Church: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem."—In thanksgiving: "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me."'

Alas! how seldom does God hear this from us! There was a time when this heavenly exercise commenced—O that it had been earlier! But it will never end. They that dwell in His house will be still praising Him.

Because my finite capacity will not admit of blessedness infinite in the degree, it shall be infinite in the duration; and, by happy reviews of the past, and unbounded prospects of the future, I shall feel perpetually growing beatitudes, and shall be always singing a new song. My mourning days; and my warring days; and my waiting days; and watching days; and my praying days; will soon be past—But

> "My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
> While life, or breath, or being last,
> Or immortality endures."

MARCH 12.

"*By love serve one another.*"
Gal. v. 13.

THIS admonition implies our connexion with, our dependence upon, and our obligation to each other. The service it enjoins is levied upon all, without exception; and is to be displayed in every way in which we can afford mutual assistance.

But let me observe what it requires as the *principle* of the practice—Love—"By love serve one another."

The principle may be wanting where the service is not. And this may be easily proved and exemplified. A man has a sum of money to dispose of; he hears of a person by whom it is desired, and to whom it will be useful; and he advances it on proper security. But is the borrower's need or his own gain the motive?—A hospital is built for the reception of poor patients. A rich man in the neighbourhood becomes a subscriber and a patron. "He is so charitable!" Nay; he wishes to maintain the character of a man of liberality; and he fears appearing to a disadvantage, when compared with his wealthy neighbour. Hence many who give, give in a way that will be sure to make it known: they therefore impart it through the medium of some other—in spite of the admonition, not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. Some would never give, if the name was not printed. Some connect themselves with public institutions, and labour to establish and enlarge them, who would individually do nothing—but here they are put upon the committee, and gain distinction. But love seeketh

not her own—It regards only the good of the recipient. There are four reasons why we should serve from this principle.

First. Without it the service has no value or excellency in the sight of God. It may be useful to the beneficiary; but it will be nothing to the benefactor—Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels; and give all my goods to feed the poor; and even give my body to be burnt; and have not love; it profiteth me nothing. The Lord looketh to the heart. If this be right, the least service is regarded by him; and where it is not, the most costly sacrifices are disdained. "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Secondly. This will render the service pleasing to the performer. It is the nature of love to make even difficult things easy, and bitter ones sweet. This made the seven years of hard labour, which Jacob served for Rachel, seem to him as so many days. Every thing follows the heart, not only really, but cheerfully.

Thirdly. What is done from love, will excel in the manner. Being done willingly, and pleasantly, it will be done more gracefully, and welcomely. What a man does grudgingly, he does disagreeably, harshly, repulsively. He puts on a north-east face; turns himself half round; murmurs and complains; perhaps reproaches too; and if he yields at last, you feel no more obliged than if he refused. The ungracious, unfeeling mode spoils the thing. Men may act the hypocrite, but it is almost impossible, without love, to act *courteously* and *kindly*. But where love actuates, the sufferer is not insulted while he is relieved. Alms are not flung in his face, instead of being given. The wound of distress is not torn open, but gently touched with an angel-hand. I have seen, I have heard some refuse entirely, or in a degree, in a way that has soothed, and even satisfied, the unsuccessful petitioner—"I wish it *was* in my power—I lament my inability—I wish this trifle was ten times more—Such as it is, the blessing of God go with it—and with thee." I wonder not that love is called a *grace*—I am sure it deserves the name, not only for its origin, but for its carriage and behaviour.

Lastly. This will make the service more efficient. It will constantly excite us, and we shall think we have done nothing while any thing remains to be done. For love is generous. It does not stand conditioning. It will not be stinted by rules, and set measures; it does not want urgings and excitements, like reluctance and taskings. The person influenced by love, cannot, without shame, sit and enjoy the luxuries of his table, while Penury and Distress are his next-door neighbours. He cannot go out of his road to preserve his sensibility from being shocked at the sight of a bleeding traveller. He will let his eye affect his heart. He will not say to the hungry and naked, Be ye warmed, and be ye fed, while he gives them not such things as are needful. He will give to his power; yea, and if some were to judge—beyond his power. He will not incapacitate himself for beneficence by indulging extravagance of any kind. He will labour with his own hands, and guide his affairs with discretion, to increase his means. He will not grow weary in well-doing; and when he meets with instances of ingratitude, though he laments the evil, he will not suffer them to justify illiberality.

This sweet little verse, if universally acted upon, would immediately turn this earth into a paradise—"Owe no man," therefore, "any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law"—he hath also fulfilled the Gospel too—for "the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned."

—You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—How did He—in the face of our unworthiness—and fore-seeing our sad returns—how did he—look at Bethlehem, and Calvary—how did he, by love, serve us? Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children: and walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.

MARCH 13.

"*When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*"—Deut. xx. 1.

Israel was now a camp, rather than a nation. Though Canaan was given them, they were to take and defend it by force of arms. Hitherto they had seen little of war, having had only a few brushes in their journey with inferior adversaries. But things would soon become more serious; and they would see horses, and chariots, and a people more than themselves. Hence they would be liable to alarm; and it was necessary for them to know

what they had to embolden them. Moses therefore admonishes and encourages them; and both the admonition and the encouragement will apply to ourselves.

Religion is a state of conflict. All Christians are soldiers. They wage, indeed, a good warfare. It will bear examination. Every thing commends it; and every thing *requires* it. It is not only a just but a *necessary* war—all that is valuable is at stake—and we must conquer or die. But it is a trying warfare. It continues through every season, and in every condition. It is here admitted, that the forces of their enemies may be very superior to their own, in number, wisdom, vigilance, and might.

Hence the danger of apprehension and alarm. And fortitude is the virtue of a warrior; and none needs it more than the man who wrestles with all the powers of darkness. And none has more grounds for courageousness than he. If he considers his foes and himself only, his confidence must fail him: but he has something else to consider—

First, The Divine presence: "For the Lord thy God is with thee." And "how many," said Antigonas to his troops, dismayed at the numbers of the foe; "How many do you reckon me for?" But God is all-wise and almighty. Nothing is too hard for the Lord—and if He be with us, "they that be with us are more than they that be with them"—"Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world."

Secondly, His agency: "Who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." This, to the Jew, was not only a proof, but a pledge: It not only showed what he *could* do, but was a voucher for what he *would* do. For he is always the same: and will not suffer what he has done to be undone. It would have been strange, after opening them a passage through the sea, to have drowned them in Jordan. What would he have done for his great Name, after placing himself at their head to lead them to the Land of Promise, if he had suffered them to be overcome by the way? He who begins the good work, is not only able to finish, but begins it for the very purpose. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

"Grace will complete what grace begins,
To save from sorrows or from sins:
The work that Wisdom undertakes,
Eternal Mercy ne'er forsakes."

MARCH 14.

"*That I may win Christ.*"—Phil. iii. 8.

Is this the language of Paul? Is *he* the candidate for Christ? How well might he say, that in the subjects of divine grace, old things are passed away, and all things are become new! What a change must have taken place in his own experience! Compare the man with himself. Now a blasphemer of the Name of Jesus—and now asking at his feet, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Now persecuting his followers—and now preaching the faith that once he destroyed. Now living a Pharisee, and boasting of his Jewish privileges and attainments—now saying, What things were gain to me, those I count loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung—that I may *win* Christ.

Yet had he not won him *already?* For many years he had known, and served, and enjoyed him. But intense affection makes us think that we are never sure enough of the object. Intense delight in any good, makes us long after more fruition. There is this difference between a convinced sinner, and an experienced believer in Christ: the former desires, only from a sense of want; the latter desires also, from the relish of the enjoyment. For *he* has tasted that the Lord is gracious. And hence he the more earnestly cries, Lord, evermore give me this bread. Taste provokes appetite. Advancement in knowledge produces humility and dissatisfaction. Hence the nearer any one approaches completeness in any thing, the more easily he discerns, and the more mortifyingly he feels, his remaining deficiencies. And no wonder, therefore, the Apostle should here say, "I have not attained, I am not already perfect:" for here, so immense is the blessing, that what is possessed will never bear a comparison with what remains: and as the object is infinite, and the faculty finite, there will always be a possibility of addition; and the happiness derivable from the Saviour will not only be eternal, but eternally increasing.

But is this prize attainable by us? In answer to this—How is He placed before us in the Scripture? Is he exhibited only to our view? or proposed to our hope? Are not *all* allowed, invited, commanded to seek him? And all *without exception?* And could *any* be condemned for rejecting him, if he was not placed within their reach?

But what is necessary to make him our own? Not *desert.* Witness the characters of those who are encouraged to hope in him. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He died for the ungodly. Indeed, if any meritorious qualifications were to be possessed, or conditions to be performed, in order to our obtaining him, our case would be desperate.

But *desire* is necessary. Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find. Warrant is

one thing, disposition is another: unless we are convinced of our need of him, we cannot long after him; and unless we value him, the blessing could not gratify and content us, if acquired.

Sacrifice is therefore needful; and when the desire is supremely urgent and active, and nothing can be a substitute for the object, we shall be ready to part with whatever stands in competition with him. Hence we read in the Scripture, of selling all to buy the pearl of great price. Buying, here, does not signify giving an equivalent for him—for who could think of this! But, as in buying, to acquire something, something is parted with; so it is here. And whether it be the pride of reason, or self-righteousness, or our worldly connexions and interests, or our sins, that keep us back from him, we must forsake them all; and follow him. And shall we not be more, infinitely more than indemnified—if we *win Christ?*

MARCH 15.

"*That I may win Christ.*"—Phil. iii. 8.

—And what a prize is He! The tongue of men and of angels would infinitely fail to do *Him* justice. The sacred writers, though inspired, labour for language and imagery to aid us to conceive a little of *his* worth. He is the hope; the Saviour; the consolation; the glory of his people of Israel. He is Lord of all. In him all fulness dwells. In winning Him, we gain all pure, spiritual, durable, satisfying good. We gain a way to God; a justifying righteousness; a sanctifying Spirit; a sufficiency of grace to help in time of need; a peace that passeth all understanding; a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory—we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

If an ancient philosopher had been asked, what one thing would entirely have met all his wants, and satisfied all his hopes and desires, he would have been at a loss for an answer. But ask a Christian this question, and, without a moment's hesitation, he replies, All I need, all I wish, is to "win Christ." Let me attain him, and I shall—I can look no further.

How blessed, then, is the winner! He is happy now. Happy alone. Happy in trouble. Happy in death—How much more happy will he be hereafter! By this acquisition he is raised above the condition of Adam in Paradise—above the estate of angels in heaven. His portion is to be judged of by what *Christ* is; and by what *Christ* has. For he has won *Him!*

But how foolish is the despiser! How poor! How wretched! How miserable in time! How much more miserable in eternity!

How *can* we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?

O my soul, hear him and live—"He that findeth me, findeth life; and shall obtain favour of the Lord: but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me, love death."

MARCH 16.

"*When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.*"—Gal. i. 15.

Paul is here referring to two events—his natural birth, and his spiritual birth—the one connecting him with the world—the other with the Church. The former of these is common to all men; the latter is confined to few. The former affords us no security from the wrath to come—"Because they are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour." The latter makes us heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Both these, therefore, are important. But the one is far more momentous than the other. The multitude are not thus minded. They keep the day of their birth, and are thankful for the continuance of life; but never inquire—has he who separated me from my mother's womb called me by his grace? Has he made me not only a creature, but a new creature? Am I, not only a partaker of that life whose days are few and evil; but of the life which the just live by faith, and which shall endure for ever?

This is the main thing. And you will deem it so—when conscience shall be awakened; when heart and flesh shall fail; and the cold hand of death lays hold of you, to bring you into the presence of the Judge of all. To this therefore attend; and regard it without delay. We would not have you indifferent to the beauties of Nature, and the bounties of Providence: but let it be your chief concern to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Say, with David, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." But oh! rest not satisfied till you can say, with Paul, "He called me by his grace."

Regeneration is necessary. The nature of religion demands it. The nature of God demands it. The nature of heaven demands it. Ye *must* be born *again*. Observe, *again*. Paul, you see, had been born twice: and if you are not born twice before you die once, it had been good for you if you had never been born. Those born once only, die twice—they die a temporal, and they die an eternal death. But those who are born twice, die only once—for on them the second death hath no power.

Paul was as fully persuaded of his being called by grace as he was of his having been

separated from his mother's womb. What a satisfaction must this be to the assured individual! All are not equally privileged. Some have fears concerning their conversion. But even this anxiety is a token for good. And let them remember, that there is a certainty *attainable* not only in Christian doctrine, but in Christian experience; and let them give all diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end. Let them wait on the Lord and keep his way; and read the things that are written unto them that believe on the Name of the Son of God, that they may know that they have eternal life.

—Little, when Paul was born, did any know what he was destined to be. The father embraced him; the mother forgot her anguish, for joy that a man was born into the world. His birth was no way distinguished from any other birth. His religious friends could not look into the future, nor conjecture the powers he was to develop, the space he was to occupy in history, the labours he was to perform, the advantages he was to render the human race to the end of time—nothing of all this could they foresee in this helpless babe. But here was the acorn of the oak. God saw the end from the beginning. Gamaliel's pupil, the zealous Pharisee, the bloody persecutor, the praying penitent, the Christian disciple, the inspired apostle—all, all were present to His view when he separated him from his mother's womb. And even then he had done virtually what He did actually in the journey to Damascus—called him by his grace. Time is nothing with Him. Design is accomplishment. Every thing has its season. All the circumstances of life, and godliness; of our birth, and our conversion; are arranged by Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints. He hath done all things well.

"Heaven, earth, and sea, and fire, and wind,
Show me thy wonderous skill;
But I review myself, and find
Diviner wonders still.

"Thy awful glories round me shine
My flesh proclaims thy praise:
Lord, to thy works of Nature join
Thy miracles of grace."

MARCH 17.

"*The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*"—Rom. x. 12.

Power and benevolence are rarely united in our fellow-creatures. Here is one who has abundance; but he has no disposition to do good: he turns away his ear from hearing the poor; and seems to live as if he was born for himself only. Yea, the disposition often decreases as the capacity increases; so that there are some who not only give less comparatively, but less really, than they did when they were poorer. Then it hardly seemed worth their while to be covetous and to hoard, but now they have the means, and the temptation conquers them. On the other hand, there is many a one who has bowels of mercies; but he can only pity, and shed unavailing tears over victims of distress. He is compelled to say only, Be ye warmed and be ye filled, for he has it not in his hand to give such things as are needful for the body—his hand is shortened that it cannot save, though his ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. But some few there are, in whom the means, and the mind to use them, are found united. The Lord increase their number! These are little images of Himself, in whom we equally find greatness and goodness, the resources and the readiness of compassion. "He is over all; and he is rich unto all that call upon him."

Let me look at his greatness.—He is over all. All beings of every rank are under his absolute control. He rules over all *material* agents—over all *animal* agents: over all *human* agents: over the best of men; the greatest of men; the worst of men—over all *invisible* agents: over devils; over angels over departed spirits. He is Lord both of the dead and the living. How astonishing then are his possessions and his dominion? A nation seems a great thing to us. But what is the greatest nation, to our earth? And what is our earth, to the luminaries of heaven? Many of these are discernible by the naked eye. When this fails, art assists nature: and Herschel sees innumerably more. When the telescope fails, the imagination plunges into the immensity beyond, and we exclaim, Lo! these are parts of his ways—But how small a portion is known of Him—

Yet—for his mercy equals his majesty—the *same* Lord who is over all, "is rich unto all that call upon him." His goodness has three characters.

First. It is plenteous—He is *rich* unto all that call upon him. Some, if they are bountiful, are poor in bounty. And this appears not only in the smallness of their gifts, but in the mode of giving. It seems done by constraint, not willingly and of a ready mind. It does not drop from them as honey from the comb, or flow like water from a spring—it seems an unnatural effort. You feel no more respect when they give much, than when they give little—every thing like nobleness is destroyed by the manner: the meanness of the disposition is betrayed; and the poor-spirited mortal can no more give kindly and generously than a clown can dance gracefully. But the Lord God is a sun—He gives grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold. He is abundant in goodness and in truth. He abundantly pardons. And while he gives liberally, he upbraideth not.

Secondly. It is impartial. He is rich *unto all* that call upon him. For there is no differ-

ence between Jew and Greek. And the same will apply to sex, and age, and calling, and condition, and character. The proclamations of divine grace exclude none, whatever be their circumstances—and it is well they do not. If *any* were excluded, awakened souls would be sure to find themselves among the exceptions. But what exceptions can any find when they read—"Preach the Gospel to every creature;" "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely!" Evangelical mercy is like Noah's Ark, that took in the clean and the unclean—only with this difference in favour of the truth above the type: there all the beasts came out as they went in; whereas, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. He changes all he receives, and sanctifies all he saves.

Thirdly. It is wise—He is rich unto all that *call* upon him. This is required, and cannot be dispensed with. Not only because God wills it; but because it seemeth good in his sight. He knows that we should never praise him for blessings which we do not value: and he knows that we never could be made happy by them. For that which gratifies, is something that relieves our want; fulfils our desire; accomplishes our hope; and crowns our endeavours. God's way, therefore, is to make us sensible of our state, and to cause us to hunger and thirst after righteousness; and then we shall be filled: for whoso asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

God reveals himself, not only for our encouragement, but imitation; and vain is our confidence in him, without conformity to him. Therefore, says the Apostle, Be ye followers of God, as dear children. How? In what?—and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour. Men would be like God, as the greatest of beings; but we are to be like him, as the best of beings. They would resemble him in his natural perfections; but we are to resemble him in his moral. They would, as He is, be over all, and gladly have every thing at their own disposal—but we are to be holy, as he is holy; and true, as he is true; and patient, as he is patient; and forgiving, as he is forgiving; and tender, as he is tender; and according to our resources, to be rich unto all that call upon us.

MARCH 18.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour."—Acts iii. 1.

The associates here were Peter and John. We should not have noticed this particularly, had we not found them so frequently and constantly together in the Scripture. The instances will readily occur to all attentive readers of the New Testament. But the reasons of this peculiar intimacy are not mentioned. Each of the two had a brother among the Apostles. But there is an amity superior to relationship: there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. It is commonly supposed, that those who attract each other and unite, very much resemble each other: whereas, Peter and John seem to have been more dissimilar than any other two of the Apostles that could have been selected. Yet may not the unlikeness be considered as one of the causes of this friendship? Peter knew the excellences of John were the opposites to his imperfections, and would tend to rectify them. Peter was eager and severe. John was more patient and affectionate. Peter was the hand, John the eye. But they were the more mutually necessary to each other.

Peter had denied his Lord, and rendered his attachment to him questionable. Perhaps John had been more compassionate towards him after his fall, and more ready to restore him in the spirit of meekness. David, after his backsliding, prayed, "Let them that fear Thee turn unto me"—and some do this much more freely than others.

But connexions and intimacies are not always accounted for. They often depend on things impossible for us to describe. They come from God, who has peculiar purposes to answer, and link us together by invisible chains. See an instance of this—"It came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." Though an heir apparent, Jonathan was at once attached to a man who was to exclude him from the succession. But the thing was of the Lord. How often do we read of God's giving a man favour in the eyes of another!

We have here a word in recommendation of friendship. It is sanctioned by Scripture and example. It is not good for man to be alone; but we are not required to put even every one we love into our bosom. Peter had many colleagues, but one companion, one friend.

Their friendship was religious; and instead of leading them to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful; it took them to the house of God, in company. Those connexions are the most valuable, in which the Bible is a witness between us; in which another world is not forgotten; in which we are bound by faith and love which are in

Christ Jesus; in which we walk together as heirs of the grace of life, that our prayers be not hindered.

We see that public devotion has claims upon us. God has commanded us not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;" and he has said, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." The worship of the sanctuary enlivens our feelings; endears us to each other; and keeps the distinctions of life from becoming excessive. There the rich and the poor meet together; and seek and serve a Being, with whom there is no respect of persons. Happy they who love the place where his honour dwelleth! Let me always avail myself of the duty; the privilege; and be glad when they say unto me, Let us go up into the house of the Lord.

MARCH 19

"Ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee."—Deut. xxxii. 7.

THERE is much truth in the proverb, He that will learn of none but himself, is sure to have a fool for *his* master. The way to advance in knowledge, is to be sensible of our own deficiencies, and willing to avail ourselves of assistance. The cause of all errors is pride; for though we are ignorant, and unable to guide ourselves, there is an infallible Instructor, under whose teachings we may place ourselves—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

And there are others that may be subordinately consulted: they possess and can impart a little of his judgment; for in his light they see light. The priest's lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. And not only ministers, but private Christians may be useful—yea, and unlearned Christians, and poor and afflicted Christians, who walk much with God, and draw in their irradiations immediately from the Scriptures. Indeed, there is hardly a being, however inferior to ourselves in some respects, but, being better versed in others, can teach us something. A wise man will learn more from a fool, than a fool will learn from a thousand wise men.—The Scripture sends us even to the brute creation: "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise."

But I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. It is true, great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment: yet they must have had many more opportunities for observation and decision than others; and God obviously intended to place some under the tuition of others. We were designed to live in a state of connexion with, and dependence upon each other: and while the old need the strength and activeness of the young, the young need the prudence and counsel of the old. Therefore, says Peter, "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." In them nothing can be more offensive than self-sufficiency. Surely, they must acknowledge, that those who are much older than themselves have at least the advantage of *experience*, which is commonly the slow growth of time, and is the most valuable of all knowledge. And when young people so often err in the connexions they form, and the steps they take, and the hazards they run into; is it not from that self-confidence which deems advice needless? They are not sober-minded; but think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

But what advantage do we derive from writing and printing! The birds and beasts are no wiser now, than when they went to Noah for shelter, and to Adam for names. It is nearly the same with savage life: knowledge is not preserved, transmitted, and increased, for want of books. But in consequence of these helps, the improvements of one age flow into another, and the stream is continually enlarging by the influx of additional discoveries. By means of them, we can consult the dead, as well as the living: for though dead, they yet speak. And we can hold converse with Bacon, and Boyle; with Luther, and Leighton: and can be *alone* with them; and be with them in their best moments; and when they are most ready to communicate. Yea, by the Scriptures, we can associate with Paul, and Isaiah; with Moses, and the Patriarchs; and can sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

MARCH 20.

"Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily."—Psalm lxxxvi. 3.

So David, though a man after God's own heart, and perhaps the greatest proficient in experimental and devotional piety before the coming of Christ, felt *his* need of mercy, and sought it daily. Let us follow his example, and cry daily

—For pardoning mercy. It is well for us that He is ready to forgive. Who can understand his errors? In many things we offend all. What omissions of duty are we chargeable with! If our actions are materially good, how defective are their principle and motive! The sins of our holy things would condemn us. Usher, one of the best as well as one of

the greatest of men, therefore said, he hoped to die with the words of the publican in his mouth, God be merciful to me a sinner; and he died pronouncing them. And Paul, after eulogizing Onesiphorus so highly for his good works, adds, "The Lord grant that *he* may find mercy of the Lord in that day"—he, even he, would need mercy—to the last, and, above all—at the last. And where is the man, who, in prospect of *that* day, must not fall upon his knees, and pray, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

—Let us cry daily for sanctifying mercy. We cannot be in a proper state of mind if we only see the guilt of sin, and not the pollution also: if our fear only be excited, and not our aversion: if we are concerned to be delivered from the wrath to come, but not to be "saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." "I want," says the Christian, "true holiness. I want to bear more of the image of the heavenly. I want to be purified even as He is pure."

—Let us cry daily for assisting mercy. What can we do *alone* in our trials and our duties; in our calling as men, and our vocation as Christians? We cannot see to-morrow with the light of to-day: nor will our present food yield us future support—we must have fresh supplies of light and of food. And we must have fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, to help our infirmities, to renew our strength; and to enable us to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We must live in the Spirit, that we may walk in the Spirit.

Let us cry daily for preserving mercy. Our reputation, our substance, our business, our health—every thing is exposed; and He is the preserver of men. But the great thing is the soul. To what dangers is not this liable! And he who knows his perils and himself, will not only watch, but pray, lest he enter into temptation. He knows that God alone can keep him from falling, and that without him he can no more stand than a staff when the hand is withdrawn. Therefore his language will be, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

—Let us cry daily for providing mercy. He has taught us this—When we pray, say, Give us day by day our daily bread. Bread signifies sustenance at large: but the word employed is wisely chosen; it is to teach us moderation. We are not to pray for dainties, but to be fed with food convenient for us. Our necessity, as well as safety, if properly consulted, will keep us from seeking great things to ourselves. Nature wants little: and grace, less.

—Let us cry daily for guiding mercy. How much depends, not only upon a wrong course, but even a wrong step! It may give a new character to my condition. It may quarter upon me repentence for life. And the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. What a privilege that He, who cannot err, is as willing as he is able to lead me. To him alone let me repair, and on him alone depend, saying, as the language both of choice and of confidence—*Thou* shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.

Then daily prayer will be turned into ceaseless praise; and I shall sing of the mercy of the Lord for ever.

MARCH 21.

"*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy.*"—Zeph. iii. 17.

It is obvious He *can* save—for he is in the *midst* of them, and *mighty*. Here is nearness and power: He is therefore able to save to the uttermost—whatever be the heinousness of guilt, or the depravity of nature, or the extremity of danger, or the depth of distress.

But he *will* save—He is inclined, he is engaged, he is bound by promise, and oath, and blood—

—Neither does he repent of the obligation under which he has been pleased to bring himself—neither does he perform the work with reluctance—He will save, he will *rejoice over them with joy.*

—Are they his vineyard? I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. Are they his sheep? "The Lord shall save them in that day, as the flock of his people: neither shall the beast of the field devour them; but they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods."

But what is this Salvation? It does not exclude temporal preservation and deliverance. He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. If he does not find a way, he can easily make one. Thus he saved Joseph from prison; and David from the paw of the lion and the bear, and the uncircumcised Philistine; and Elijah from famine; and Jonah from the belly of hell.

We are not to look for miracles, but we may look for Him who performed them; and who has said, I will be with thee in trouble. He has all events at his control. He is always the same. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. A distinction, however, is to be here observed. Temporal deliverances are promised *conditionally*. He could not have promised *them* otherwise. It would be rather a threatening than a promise, were he to engage to relieve and indulge you, whether it be good for you or evil. And it *might* be evil; and though you may not be

aware of it, he can foresee it, and will prevent it. He has therefore said, They that seek the Lord shall not want any *good* thing. As to your property, he can make a hedge about all that you have. As to your reputation, he can hide you in the secret of his pavilion from the strife of tongues. As to your body, he can keep all your bones so that not one of them shall be broken; and if it be good for you, he will—he must do it. But if it would be otherwise, he will disappoint your wishes and hopes, and make the privation the privilege.

But as to the *soul!* Ah! what did you mean when you first asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" When you first prayed, "Save me, and I shall be saved?" You thought of nothing earthly then—but—of redemption from the curse of the Law; of deliverance from the powers of darkness; of freedom from the sting of death; of release from the dominion and being of sin. And it was said unto you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And *this* salvation is insured. *This* salvation is begun. You are already justified by his blood, and saved from wrath through him. You are already renewed in the spirit of your mind. You have already the earnest of your inheritance; and taste some of the grapes of Eshcol. And as to the completion, now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The night is far spent: the day is at hand.

And what is every thing beside! All well with the soul! All well for eternity! A smiling God! An opening heaven!—

> "A hope so much divine
> May trials well endure."

MARCH 22.

"*Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*—1 Peter iv. 12.

Are we then, before we really suffer, to suffer in imagination; tormenting ourselves with gloomy fears, and embittering present comfort by future apprehension? No.

But neither are we to indulge presumption. We are to consider difficulties as well as advantages; and though light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, yet we are to remember also the days of darkness, for they shall be many. If we do not admit the possibility of disappointment and distress, we shall, when they occur, be dismayed and confounded, and say, If I am his, why am I thus? What is unexpected is overpowering: it does not leave us, for the time, the use either of reason or religion; and we resemble a soldier, who, while seeking his weapons, gives the enemy an advantage against him. But to be fore-warned, is to be fore-armed: and what we reckon upon in the course of an enterprise, confirms, by the event, the reasonableness of our scheme. The Apostle would not have us to be surprised, or deem it a strange thing, even if our trial should be fiery. A strange thing is a thing unlooked for, and which we had no reason to expect. But is this the case with our afflictions?

—Think of the ordinary state of humanity. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward; and is it strange that he should inherit? How numerous and how delicate are the organs of the body! yet they are constantly in use, and in danger. To how many accidents are we exposed! How many seeds of disorder are lodged within us! Every possession makes us capable of loss; every connexion, of bereavement; every enjoyment, of grief; every hope, of fear. The wonder is, that we are ever free from trouble.

—Hear the declarations of Scripture. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Through much tribulation you must enter the Kingdom." Are these the true sayings of God?

—Trace the history of his people. However dear to God, or eminent in grace, which of them escaped!

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown:
> No traveller e'er reach'd that bless'd abode,
> Who found not thorns and briers on the road."

Is this only the language of poetry? "What son is he," asks the Apostle, "whom the father chasteneth not?" "As many as I love," says God, "I rebuke and chasten."

Consider the disposition of the world—"Marvel not if the world hate you." If they hate the light, they are not likely to love those who diffuse it. The principles and walk of the Christian reproach and condemn, not only the profane, but many who would pass for religious, but who deny the power of godliness, while they have the form. The mere moral and pharisaical are often the bitterest enemies of evangelical piety. The rule was once deemed without exception: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The absence of it now, is owing, not to the want of disposition, but power. Many things restrain it; yet it is restrained only in the degree. The hand is tied; but the tongue is free—and how does it deal with the decided followers of the Lamb? And what is the carnal mind, but enmity against God?

—Survey the Christian's spiritual imperfections and necessities. Without suffering, how can they resemble the Saviour? and be weaned from the world? and be witnesses for God? and be prepared for usefulness? Can the welfare of the year dispense with winter? Is it a strange thing for the husbandman to

plough up the fallow ground, to receive the seed? or for the vinedresser to prune the vine? or for the refiner to put his gold into the furnace? Such a needs be is there for all our afflictions: and he only who is ignorant of it, can wonder at the event.

But, Christian, while you look for the fiery trial, so as not to be astonished at the experience—remember, you have enough to encourage you. He who died for you, and rose again, and rules over all, has made provision for every condition in which you shall be found. As thy sufferings abound, thy consolation shall abound also. If the way be rough, thy shoes shall be iron and brass: and as thy day, so shall thy strength be—Till the last tear is wiped away—and all shall be peace, and quietness, and assurance for ever.

MARCH 23.

"*I know whom I have believed.*"—2 Tim. i. 12.

Or trusted, as it is in the margin. This is preferable; for the Apostle is referring to an act of confidence rather than of belief; and which was expressed by his entrusting the Saviour with a deposit, or committing his soul into his hands.

The knowledge of which he speaks is not only, or principally, the knowledge he had of the Lord Jesus *before* he believed on him. He had indeed such a knowledge, and he *must* have had; for how can we believe on him of whom we have not heard? And who would commit a jewel to a stranger? Who would walk over a deep abyss without inquiring whether the plank was sound or rotten? Ignorance in such a case would render confidence the act of a fool; whereas faith in Christ is wisdom; and when a man commits his eternal all to him, he has the highest reason in the world for so doing. This previous knowledge, however, is derived entirely from testimony.

But there is also a subsequent knowledge derived from experience: and he that believeth hath the witness in himself. He knows the bitterness of gall, and the sweetness of honey, not from report, but from taste. My conscience, says he, was burdened, and I found no relief till I applied to the blood of sprinkling. Without him, I can do nothing: but I know that his grace is sufficient for me; for I have made the trial of it, both in duty and in distress. I have read and heard much of his excellency: and I have put it to the proof—He is now a tried friend and benefactor. I have tried—much—and often—his power, faithfulness, and care; and have found them trustworthy. I therefore feel satisfaction in reviewing what I have done. I have often been imposed upon, often played the fool; but not here. Of many things I have repented; but the longer I live, the less am I disposed to repent of this transaction. I have examined it in the retirement of the closet; in the light of Scripture; in the view of death and eternity; and the more I consider it, the more I approve and glory in the deed. And I will recommend the same to others—and I can speak with the boldness and earnestness of conviction—for I know whom I have believed.

And here we see the value of this knowledge. It increases reliance and confidence. Hence, says David, "They that know thy Name will put their trust in thee:" that is, they will trust with more ease and more firmness. Whence arise many of the doubts and fears of Christians, but from their living more upon their frames and feelings than upon the clear and full views of the truth as it is in Jesus! As soon as ever you have committed a valuable treasure to any one, you become alive to his character; and unless you are well acquainted with it, every surmising, every loose report, every dark and unexplained circumstance, may trouble and terrify the heart—even though the deposit may be secure. For though the safety of the deposit depends on the goodness of his character, your satisfaction depends upon your knowledge of it.

Let me therefore be concerned to grow in grace, and also—and for this very purpose—in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let me search the Scriptures, for they are they that testify of him. Let me attend his House, and the preaching of his Word. Let me converse much with those who have been much with him. Let me earnestly implore the influence of the Holy Spirit, who, says the Saviour, shall glorify me, for he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you. Paul, after such a length of acquaintance, and such a depth of intimacy, not only said, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—but that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

MARCH 24.

"*I will walk in thy truth.*"—Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

Every resolution expressed by a good man, in a proper frame of mind, will be founded, not in self-confidence, but in dependence on divine grace. *Then* it will be useful; it will tend to stimulate and to humble; to bring to remembrance, and to bind—it will be like a hedge that defends the field; or like the hemming, that keeps the robe from ravelling out.—"I will walk in thy truth," is a noble resolution, and worthy our imitation.

Walking, in the Scripture, takes in the whole of our conversation or conduct: and to walk *in* any thing, intends a fulness of it. For a man to *walk in* pride, is something

more than to be proud: it says, that pride is his way: his element: that he is wholly under the influence of it.

Four ways we should thus walk in God's truth.

—We should walk in the belief of his truth. It deserves our credence. It is a faithful saying, as well as worthy of all acceptation. If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater. Men are very tenacious of the honour of their word. If their veracity be denied, they instantly demand satisfaction for the insult. How often is God made a liar! How slow of heart are we to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Lord, increase our faith.

—We should walk in the practice of his truth. This is as necessary as the former, and the evidence of it; for we are to show our faith by our works. Faith without works, is as the body without the soul: there is nothing vital or operative in it. The Gospel is a doctrine according to godliness. Every part of it has a practical tendency: and we are required to obey it from the heart. It is well to hear; but hearing is to be viewed in the order of means, and not as an end. Blessed are they that hear the word of God and *keep it*. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them.

—We should walk in the enjoyment of his truth. For it is not only of a sanctifying, but a consolatory nature: it brings us glad tidings of great joy; it is all written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. If, therefore, our conversation *becometh* the Gospel, it will be happy, as well as holy. Thus it was with the first Christians: they walked not only in the fear of the Lord, but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They were not free from trouble; but, as the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, the consolation also abounded by Christ. They were not free from complaint and self-abhorrence; but in his Name they rejoiced all the day, and in his righteousness were exalted. Of themselves they felt they could do nothing; but they were strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and through him they could do all things. They knew not what a day would bring forth; but they were careful for nothing, casting all their care on him who cared for them. The Gospel did not shut them up in a dungeon of doubts and fears; they knew the truth, and the truth made them free indeed; and they walked in the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

—We should walk in the profession of his truth. If we know the joyful sound so as to be blessed by it, we shall feel *this* yoke easy, and this burden light. We shall not act to be seen of men; but we shall have no objection that men should see us. Praise will not draw us out of a corner, and fear will not drive us into one. We shall be willing for all to know that we are not our own, but His who bought us with a price; and that we are not only bound, but determined to glorify him in our bodies and spirits. For his love will constrain us not only to confess him with the mouth, but with the life; for actions speak louder than words: despising in our eyes a vile person, but honouring them that fear the Lord: attending only where his truth is preached, and his glory is maintained; and going forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

If we are thus governed, we shall be a credit and a comfort to our ministers, who have no greater joy than to hear of their children walking in the truth. We shall hold forth the word of life, and cause them to rejoice in the day of Christ, that they have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain. We shall adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We shall be fellow-helpers to the truth. And the Judge will *graciously* say—"They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

MARCH 25.

"*The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be for ever.*" Psalm xxxvii. 18.

Every thing here requires attention—

—The *persons*—"The upright." The upright mean those who are sincere: sincere in their dealings with their fellow-creatures; with their own souls; and with their God. The character is equally rare and excellent. It admits of imperfection, but not of partiality; and is never found separate from the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

—The *period*—"Their days." These are "known of God." This knowledge being spoken of as a privilege, something more than mere intelligence must be intended: for, in this sense, He knows the days of the wicked, as well as of the upright. The meaning is, that he knows them kindly and graciously; that he feels, and will acknowledge his concern in them; and make them all work together for their good. He knows their number—This is with him. He has appointed it: friends cannot enlarge, enemies cannot reduce it. Whenever they die, they have filled their days, and are immortal till their work is done. He knows the nature of them—and he determines it—

> "If light attends the course they run,
> 'Tis he provides those rays;
> And 'tis his hand that veils their sun,
> If darkness clouds their days."

—Have they days of affliction? He knows them: knows their source, their pressure, how long they have continued, the support they require, and the proper time to remove them.—Have they days of danger? He knows them; and will be a refuge and defence in

them.—Have they days of duty? He knows them; and will furnish the strength and the help they require.—Have they days of inaction, when they are laid aside from their work, by accident or disease? He knows them; and says to his servants, under every prevention, "It is well that it was in thy heart."—Have they days of privation, when they are denied the ordinances of religion, after seeing his power and glory in the temple, and going with the voice of gladness to keep holy day? He knows them; and will follow his people when they cannot follow him; and be a little sanctuary to them in their losses.—Have they days of declension and of age, in which their strength is fled, and their senses fail, and so many of their connexions have gone down to the dust—evil days, wherein they have no pleasure? He knows them; and says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth. Even to old age I am He, and to hoar hairs will I bear and carry you."

—The *portion*—"Their inheritance shall be for ever." So was not the inheritance of many of the angels in heaven; for they kept not their first estate. So was not the inheritance of Adam in Paradise; for the Lord drove out the man. So was not the inheritance of the Jew in Canaan; for the glory of all lands was made a desolation. So is not the inheritance of the man of the world: his portion is in this life. And what is this but a vapour, a shadow? Yet, at the end of it, he is stripped of all, and departs as naked as he came. Yea, and before the close, his hopes and comforts may be all laid bare. For—

"Short-lived as *we* are, yet our pleasures, we see,
Have a much shorter date, and die sooner than we."

But the Christian has not only being, and health, and riches, and honour, and peace, and joy, and friendship—but all these for ever!

Indeed, the more important and valuable the acquisition, the more miserable he would feel if there was any uncertainty in the continuance. The thought of loss, and even of danger, would embitter all. But it is for ever—for ever! Yea, it will be always increasing. After millions of years we shall be singing a new song.

In the world we may have losses, but they cannot affect our estate. "I, one day," says Mr. Newton, "visited a family that had suffered by a fire, which had destroyed all the house and the goods. I found the pious mistress in tears. I said, Madam, I give you joy! Surprised, and ready to be offended, she exclaimed, 'What! joy that all my property is consumed?' I give you joy that you have so much property that no fire can touch. This turn checked the grief, and she wiped her tears, and smiled like the sun, shining after an April shower." Thus the Hebrews took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance.

MARCH 26.

"*And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.*"—John xiv. 29.

He refers to what he had said concerning his death and resurrection; his sufferings and glory. As nothing befell him by chance, so nothing took him by surprise. All was laid out in his view: and he saw the end from the beginning—and foretold it all before any of it had come to pass. For what purpose? "That, when it is come to pass," says he, "ye might believe."

Hence we see the importance of faith. This is what he always required in those he healed. "Only believe," said he to the ruler of the synagogue. He said to his disciples, with regard to the death of Lazarus, "I am glad, for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." If a man wishes a tree to grow, he waters not the branches, but the root. Holy tempers and good works are the fruits of religion—Faith is the root; and as this is enlivened, every thing in the divine life prospers. Unbelief makes God a liar! renders the Scripture a nonentity; and leaves the soul open to every sin. But he that believeth shall be saved. Yea, he hath everlasting life. By faith we stand; walk; live. We are justified, we are sanctified, by faith. Faith purifies the heart, and overcometh the world. Unless we believe, we shall not be established. We are filled with all joy and peace in believing—We read of the joy of faith; the prayer of faith; the work of faith; the obedience of faith; the fight of faith—every thing is ascribed to faith in the word of God.

—Here we learn, also, that there may be an improvement in faith, where the principle is already found. Did not these disciples believe at this very time? They had been with him from the beginning. They had heard his sayings, and witnessed his miracles, and seen his glory. And they believed on him too. And had left all to follow him. But they did not sufficiently believe. Their faith was too obscure in its views; too feeble in its hold; too powerless in its operation. Are there not, then, degrees in godliness? May there not be a growth in grace? Does not Paul tell the Thessalonians, that their faith grew exceedingly? And how desirable is this progress! The strong in faith have a thousand advantages above the weak. The latter have a heaven hereafter; the former have a heaven here too. And if the Apostles were defective, and said, Lord, increase our faith, what need have we to cry out, with tears, like the father of the child, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

—We remark, also, that one of the best means of increasing and establishing our faith, is to compare the word and the works

of the Lord together. This was the help and advantage he would here insure to his disciples: "Now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." So did the Church in the time of David: "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God." We have heard the promises, and we have seen the fulfilment. We have heard the threatenings, and we have seen the execution. We have heard the doctrine, and we have seen the practice. As soon as Jesus had said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth," the nobleman "believed, and went his way. But as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth! Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house." That is, he now believed more firmly and impressively; and this was the consequence of comparison. Thus, facts are yielding us constant and growing evidence of the truth of God's word. Upon this principle, apostates and scoffers do not scandalize us—the Scripture tells us they will come. We read in the Scripture, the way of transgressors is hard: that he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely: that the merciful shall obtain mercy: that the way of the slothful is a hedge of thorns—and how little must he have observed the experience of others, or consulted his own, who is not every day more convinced of the truth of these declarations!

—Finally. Does not this clearly intimate, that the benefit to be derived from prophecy is subsequent to its accomplishment? "Now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." He mentions the same thing in several other places: and we are informed, in more than one instance, of the result. Thus we read—"When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." So, also, when they had witnessed his "zeal" in purifying the temple, "his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Thus we see our remark justified. And, indeed, how can it be otherwise? Where is the evidence of the truth of prophecy before it come to pass? You say, a God who cannot lie has spoken it. But God himself does not demand our faith on the announcement, but on the event. And how little can it be understood beforehand; unless as to its general bearings! A definite and particular acquaintance with the contents of divine predictions would derange the order of Providence, and in many cases hinder the effect. Had this fact been duly considered, much time and attention would have been more profitably employed, than in attempts to open the seals, and blow the trumpets, and pour out the vials of the Apocalypse. There is no prophet among us, not any that telleth how long; yet there are, as Fuller calls them, "fortune-tellers of the Church." Pastors have been drawn away from their proper work—— And "the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed"——And sinners are not converted from the error of their ways. For even allowing the views, advanced with so much presumption, to be just and true, they are not repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostles preached a crucified Saviour—and determined to know nothing else.

It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. He has entrusted us with his commands; but not with his decrees. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

MARCH 27.

"*He hath done all things well.*"—Mark vii. 37.

A GREAT commendation; but deserved. Human excellences are rare and individual. One man does one thing well; another does another thing well—but He does *all* things well. The little men do well, is only *comparatively* well; all he does is *absolutely* well. And this will appear, whether we consider him as the Creator—and survey the works of nature; or as the Saviour—and contemplate the wonders of grace; or as the Governor—and examine the dispensations of his providence.

We have some fine specimens of his agency recorded in the Scripture. Take, for instance, the history of Joseph. Read it over again and again: and then ask, Could any link in this chain, any stone in this structure, have been omitted? In this achievement, could any thing have been added to the plan, or the execution? From a part we may estimate the whole. And what applies to his dealings with others, will apply to his dealings with us; for all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.

—But whence, then, is it, that we cannot really and readily, with regard to his agency in our affairs, and especially in those of a trying nature, adopt the acknowledgment, and say, He hath done all things well?

—The reason is, we judge *atheistically*. Every unregenerate sinner lives without God in the world. But a Christian is made to differ from others; and from himself. Yet his sanctification is not complete. Something is

left in him of all the old kinds of leaven; and therefore something of this atheism. He is in a good frame when, with Eli, he can say, of whatever befalls him, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." But he does not always see him. He sometimes stops at the instrumentality employed—"Oh! it was that unlucky accident; it was that heedless servant! it was that perfidious neighbour! it was that cruel enemy!"—No wonder *He* does not do *all* things well, when he is not acknowledged as doing *any* thing.

—We judge *selfishly*. We are not to view ourselves as detached individuals. We are parts of a whole; and variously connected with others. What is not good for us personally, may be good for us relatively. Suppose a trying dispensation makes us more tender and compassionate towards our fellow creatures and our fellow Christians; suppose a distressing experience gives us the tongue of the learned, and enables us to speak a word in season to him that is weary: suppose, as witnesses and examples of the power and excellency of the Gospel, we arouse the careless, and confirm the wavering: is there not enough here to call for our resignation and praise? Ezekiel was deprived of the desire of his eyes, with a stroke: to himself, this was painful; but it was profitable to his ministry, and useful to his charge—and this was the design of it. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

—We judge *carnally*. What is not pleasing may yet be beneficial: and natural evil may be moral good. When things are agreeable to our wishes, we never think of any difficulty in the divine proceedings. While we have ease, and health, and friends, and success in business, we never complain of the darkness of Providence. But as soon as there is any reverse—then we groan out, "His way is in the sea, his path in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known"—as if every thing was to be estimated by our accommodation and convenience—as if God acted wisely or unwisely, righteously or unrighteously, just as his doings affect us—and affect too, not our best interests, but our present and temporal! Is it wonderful that we, who deserve stripes, should feel the rod! that we, who need correction, should meet with chastisement! Is it mysterious that the vine should be pruned! the ground ploughed! the gold tried in the fire! If the child now thinks certain restraints, and privations, and rebukes to which the father subjects him, needless and harsh, he will more than approve of them when he comes to years of maturity.

—We judge *prematurely*. He that believeth maketh not haste. It is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God: and one reason is, because it will prevent a wrong conclusion. Therefore, says the Apostle, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come. You would not judge of the abilities of the limner from the unfinished sketch, but you would wait till the canvass had received the last touches of his masterly pencil. You would not judge of the perfection of a building from the digging of the foundation, and the coarse materials lying in a kind of disorder all around, especially if you had never seen the plan or the model: but you would stay till the parts were all put together in their places, and the top-stone brought forward with shouting—Let us stay till God has done. What I do, says he, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. Then every thing will speak for itself. Then we shall walk, not by faith, but by sight. Then we shall see what we now believe; and for ever acknowledge, "He is the rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right, is he."

MARCH 28.

"*Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*"—John xiv. 30.

There are many talkers—profane talkers—indecent talkers—foolish talkers—vain talkers. And there are some who are wise and good talkers; their lips are as a well-spring of life. But *He* was perfectly wise and good—Oh! to have heard him "talk!" The term is applied to his more public teaching—"While he yet talked to the people." And had some of his ministers spoken more in a familiar and conversational mode, then they would have resembled him more; and the poor would have had the Gospel preached unto them; and the common people would have heard them gladly; and the children in the temple would have cried Hosanna.

It is here intimated that he *had* talked "much" with them. He was never reserved. If he kept back any thing from them, it was because at the time they could not bear it. He treated them not as servants, but friends; for all things that he had heard of the Father he made known unto them. He always instructed, and reproved, and encouraged them, as the occasion required. He seized every opportunity for religious discourse, and levied a tax of spiritual profit upon every natural object and every providential occurrence that presented itself. He could not see a sower going forth to sow, or a fisherman dragging his net ashore, or a woman drawing water, but he derived from it a parable or an illustration—Teaching his followers to be social and communicative in divine things; and, for this purpose, to cultivate their understanding; and to be filled with the Spirit. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speak-

eth How can much religious discourse be expected from those who have so little of the life of God in them! If, for the sake of consistency, they sometimes make the attempt, it must be a task; and they will soon drop into what is more natural to them, a conversation empty as the wind, and barren as the sand.

—But "hereafter" he *would* not talk much with them—not from disinclination, but for want of intercourse. Their opportunities would soon be over—for he was going to leave them. With regard also to us—it is probable as to some—and certain as to others, that we have heard and read much more than we ever shall read or hear in future. Yet a little while is the light with us.

The way in which he refers to his removal from them by his suffering and death is remarkable—"For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."

He marks, First, the character of his adversary—the prince of this world. He is not so by right, but usurpation; and by God's allowing him power over those who provoke him. When the traitor had received the sop, Satan entered into him. He was in him before; but his agency was under restraints. These restraints were then all taken away; and the Devil had his victim entirely to himself. Israel would have none of him; so he gave them up to their own hearts' lust. All who walk according to the course of this world, walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. They may imagine themselves to be free, and many of them make a figure in the eye of sense: but faith sees them taken captive by the Devil at his will; and held in the vilest subjection—he is their prince—yea, according to the Apostle, he is the god of this world; and, in reality, they not only obey, but worship him.

—Secondly, he sees his approach: "He cometh." Not personally—so he had come to him in the wilderness and been foiled; but in his instruments. In Judas that betrayed him; in Peter that denied him; in his disciples that forsook him and fled; in Herod that threatened him; in Pilate that condemned him; in the Jews that clamoured for his blood; and in the Romans that shed it. "One of you," says our Lord, "is a devil"—he gives him the name, because he bore his image, and did his work." "The devil," we read, "shall cast some of you into prison." Is the Devil a justice of the peace? No; but if he acts unrighteously and cruelly, the justice of peace is the Devil. The Devil is not Voltaire; but, by poisoning and destroying the souls of men, Voltaire is the Devil, who was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.

—Thirdly, he is confident of the result of the conflict: "And hath nothing in me." He has enough in us.—First, enough of guilt. Hence he can alarm and dismay us. In the conscience of some he produces such terror and anguish, that the man chooses strangling and death rather than life. He is also the accuser of the brethren: and in their sins, and the sins even of their holy things, he finds enough against them, to perplex and distress them in their afflictions, and in their approaches to God. But he could find no guilt in Jesus; and therefore he could stir up no feeling of self-remorse or despair.—Secondly, enough of corruption. Hence he can easily draw us aside by laying hold of our envy, pride, avarice, impatience. Owing to the remains of unmortified passions, or, as the Apostle calls it, the sin that dwelleth in us, we are always in danger from outward things. We may be ensnared by our dress, our table, our business, and our friends: what is innocent and good in itself may become to us injurious and evil. Here the sparks fall upon tinder. But there was nothing inflammable in him; and therefore no unhallowed fire could be kindled. He was the Holy One of God. "He *did* no sin," and "in him *was* no sin!"

—A proof that if he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

—We also see that there must be a great difference between him and ourselves, as to moral danger. He was safe every where, and in all circumstances. We must watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation—The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

MARCH 29.

"God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" 1 Thess. v. 9.

No: "He has not appointed us to wrath." He might have done it. We deserved it. We were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But He has delivered us *from* the wrath to come. We have trials, but there is no curse in them. They come from a father who corrects, not from a judge who punishes. We may sometimes fear his wrath, but this is our infirmity. Flesh cries, Do not condemn me; but faith cries, There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

—But "to obtain salvation." We are often said to be saved already. We are so, as to our state: but not as to possession and enjoyment. This is a future blessedness. It is, indeed, begun here: but that which is held up to the hope of the believer is the accomplishment of all that God has promised—the

reception of the soul at death; the resurrection of the body at the last day; the glorification of the whole man for ever. What an object of expectation! How poor and pitiful is every thing seen and temporal, compared with this! Some are destined to shine in courts; some, to stride over the heads of others; some, to amass heaps of shining ore: but, if a Christian, thou art destined to an inheritance beyond the skies, and a crown of glory that fadeth not away. What is life? However indulged and endowed, it is, in its best estate, altogether vanity! What are the pleasures of sin—for a season! What are riches and —death! a title and—damnation at the end of it! And what are losses and afflictions to a man who is going to obtain SALVATION!

But by what medium will he acquire it?—"Through our Lord Jesus Christ." To seek it in any other way is a vain pursuit. There is salvation in none other. I am the way, said he, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. Yea, it is not only useless, but sinful. It opposes God's revealed will and express command; it robs the Lord Jesus of his highest glory: it frustrates his grace: it makes him to be dead in vain. Much comes to some, *through* others. We have had friends and benefactors —but, after all, what have they done for us? What self-denial have they exercised! What sufferings have they endured! But *he* knew what would be required of him in opening for us a passage to glory. Yet he readily consented, and said, Lo! I come. Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow or love like his sorrow—He became poor, that we might be made rich, He died, that we might live.

The Apostle does not forget to tell us, that we are *appointed* to obtain this salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. As men, we are not the creatures of chance. There is an appointed time to man upon earth. God has appointed the bounds of our habitation, and, as Christians, are we the offspring of contingency? Is conversion a happy accident? It is the work of God; and he does nothing without foreknowledge and design. Four things may be observed, with regard to this appointment. The *earliness* of it—in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.—The *freeness* of it—it was not founded on the foresight of any worthiness or works of ours—He hath saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose, and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.—Its *efficiency*—it will not, cannot fail—the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."—Its *appropriation*—blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Go back from effects to causes. Prove your calling, and thus make your election sure.

And remember one thing. Be simple, and receive the kingdom of God as a little child, not only as to its doctrines, but as to its invitations and promises. The writer, one day, attended the dying bed of a young female. I have little, said she, to relate, as to my experience. I have been much tried and tempted —but this is my sheet anchor—He has said, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. I know I come to him—and I expect that he will be as good as his word. Poor and unworthy as I am, he will not trifle with me, or deceive me—It would be beneath his greatness, as well as his goodness. I am at his feet; and you have often said—

> "'Tis joy enough, my All in All,
> At thy dear feet to lie;
> Thou wilt not let me lower fall,
> And none can higher fly."

MARCH 30.

"*When they saw him, they besought him that he would depart.*"—Matt. viii. 34.

HE had now entered the country of the Gadarenes, and cured two demoniacs. The people should have deemed themselves honoured by his presence; and have thanked him for relieving their wretched neighbours from the most dreadful malady. But he had, in correction of an unlawful traffic, destroyed their swine. They, therefore, preferring their sins to their souls, feared and hated him, and—desired him to withdraw. He took them immediately at their word—and went —and returned no more. Oh! when he comes to us, and convinces us of sin, and reproves us for our evil passions and vile courses; when he comes and makes us uneasy, by the admonitions of conscience, of friendship, of Scripture, of providence; and instead of yielding to his merciful design, we regard him as an irksome intruder, and entreat him, and he hears our meaning without speech, to leave us—he will comply with our desire—and say, They are joined to idols, let them alone—and woe unto them when I depart from them! This is an awful truth—

But it is an equally pleasing one, that if we desire his *presence*, he will indulge our wish. And, therefore, when the two disciples, going to Emmaus, reached the village whither they went, and he made as if he would have gone farther; they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent. And, it is said, he went in to tarry with them. So when the woman of Samaria had persuaded many of her neighbours to come to the well to see him; they

besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.

Saviour Jesus! Thou art all in all. Come and dwell in our country—Come and dwell in our Churches—Come and dwell in our houses—Come and dwell in our hearts for ever! Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

"I cannot bear thine absence, Lord;
My life expires if thou depart:
Be thou, my heart, still near my God,
And Thou, my God, be near my heart."

MARCH 31.

"*But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.*"—John xiv. 31.

When he says, "Arise, let us go hence"—he shows his readiness to suffer. "I will not wait for the enemy: I will go and meet him. I will go to the place where Judas will look for me. I will go to the garden of Gethsemane, where I am to agonize—and from thence to Calvary, where I am to die. I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" We always see in him this disposition—a proof that he was not compelled to engage; that he did not undertake the case from ignorance: that he did not repent of his work, even in the sight of enduring all its expensiveness of woe—He loved us, and gave himself for us.

Yet this alacrity was not rashness, but obedience—"As the Father gave me commandment." Though in his higher character he had the disposal of himself; in his human nature, and in his mediatorial office, he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *He* felt no inconsistency in this, and why should we? "No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again—This commandment have I received of my Father." So mistaken should we be in supposing that the Father was less disposed to save us than the Son, or that his love was purchased by that death which was really the effect of it, and designed to be the medium through which it should operate. Herein God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And therefore did the Father love him, because he laid down his life that he might take it again: and for the suffering of death, he crowned him with glory and honour.

—Though there was something here peculiar in our Saviour's obedience, there is something also exemplary in it. He did not expose himself *before* his hour was come; but cheerfully submitted to the Divine will, when it *was* come. So we are not to turn aside in search of trials, but to take up our cross when it is fairly in our way. We are not to be impatient to suffer; but when we are called to it, the *call* should sustain us, and bear us through, for God is with us.

And this obedience resulted from love—"I love the Father." I delight, said he, to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. His people, in their measure and degree, can say the same. As obedience is the best evidence of love, so love is the best spring of obedience. It is love that makes it pleasant to ourselves. It is love that makes it acceptable to God. With him, nothing can be a substitute for it. Indeed, we ourselves, in the conduct of our fellow-creatures towards us, judge not by the bulk of the action, but the disposition from which it proceeds. The estimate is taken, not from the service, but the principle; not from what is given, but from what is implied. The smallest donation is welcomed as a token of cordial regard; while, like God, we abhor "the sacrifice where not the heart is found."

Jesus would have this known, not to his disciples only, but to others—and to all: "But that *the world* may *know* that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." And the world ought to know it: they are deeply concerned in it, and in due time they will know it. At present a very large majority of mankind have never heard of his Name, or of his salvation. But his cause is spreading. The Scriptures are entering all languages. Missionaries are visiting all climes. The Church is praying that his Word may have free course and be glorified. And God has said, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth." It must therefore by-and-by be said, without a figure, "Behold! the world is gone away after him."

But blessed are our eyes, for they see, and our ears, for they hear. We already know these things. But *how* do we know them? Do we feel as well as understand them? Are we like a December's night, as cold as we are clear? Shall we be found in the number of those who behold, and wonder, and perish? Or, filled with admiration, and gratitude, and confidence, and zeal, beholding, as in a glass, his glory, are we changing into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord?

APRIL 1.

"*His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*"—Luke xxii. 44.

It is a question whether this sweat was blood comparatively, that is, whether it re-

sembled blood, whose drops are denser, heavier, and larger, than those of common perspiration—or really blood. The latter is possible. There have been instances of the kind well authenticated. Such an opinion early and generally prevailed; and nothing was more common among the Fathers, than to consider this as one of the times when he bled for us, each of his pores, as a kind of wound, flowing with that blood without which there is no remission. It is, perhaps, impossible to determine this absolutely. But even allowing—what we by no means consider as proved—that it was only blood in resemblance; it must have been most extraordinary. For he was abroad in the open air; upon the cold ground; the night far advanced; and the weather chilling—for the High Priest's servants made a fire to warm themselves. Here was enough to have checked perspiration—Yet his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground!

And what could have caused it? Surely not the mere circumstances of dying. Socrates—Seneca—did not sweat thus; they were cool and calm. Look at the martyrs; and even those of the more timid sex: they were tranquil in the prospect, and in many instances came forth from prison smiling, and blessed the instrument of death—What was the reason of this difference! they had not to contend with the powers of darkness; but this was their hour, and the power of darkness. They had not to bear the sins of others, nor yet their own; whereas the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all.

We indulge here no curious speculations; and we require the definitions of no human creeds: but neither will we be reasoned out of the plain language and meaning of the Scriptures. We believe God; and not as some believe him; that is, as a jury in a court believe the testimony of a suspected, a discredited witness, relying no further upon his deposition than it is collaterally supported; and thus yielding no honour to himself—We do not found our belief on knowledge; but derive our knowledge from belief. We believe in the unerring wisdom and veracity of God—and he has told us, that Christ also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust: that he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows: that the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and that by his stripes we are healed.

Men think lightly of sin; but an awakened conscience feels it a burden too heavy to bear. It has made the whole creation groan. But see Jesus bearing it in his own body—and his sweat falls as great drops of blood down to the ground! What, then, if you should bear it in your own person, O sinner!—Why it will sink thee to the lowest hell. Yet bear it you must, if you reject or neglect him; for there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin—He that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son of God, hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Yet,

> "Each purple drop proclaims there's room,
> And bids the poor and needy come."

Oh! let me look on him who suffers thus. Oh! let me mourn over my sins, which caused his anguish—

> "'Twere you that pull'd the vengeance down
> Upon his guiltless head;
> Break, break, my heart; and burst, my eyes;
> And let my sorrows bleed!"

But let me also rejoice. That bloody sweat proclaims my discharge from condemnation, and tells me the law is magnified and made honourable.

And can I help loving him? Love begets love. And what can evince love like suffering? And such suffering! And for such criminals! And not only without their desert, but their desire!—Lord! what wilt thou have me to do? Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

APRIL 2.

"*Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.*"—John xviii. 7.

EVERY thing here is remarkable.

—How wonderful that any in the very family of Jesus should be base enough to betray him! But here we find Judas, who had been called to the Apostleship, and invested with power to work miracles, and a few hours before had partaken of the Holy Supper, heading a band of men and officers, which he had obtained from the Chief Priests and Pharisees; and betraying his Master and Benefactor into their hands, with a kiss!

—How wonderful was the courage of Jesus, that, though he knew all things that should come upon him, not only remained in the place, but came forth from his retreat, and presented himself! This was the effect of a love stronger than death. Perfect love casteth out fear.

—How wonderful was the rebuke, and the repulse, which his enemies met with! No sooner did he pronounce the words, "I am he," than they went backward, and fell to the ground. Whether some rays of glory broke from his sacred body, or whether he immediately, by his power, impressed their minds, we know not; but, surely, here was enough to induce them to discontinue the unhallowed enterprise.

—Yet—how wonderful, that in a few moments they rise, and recover heart enough to approach him a second time—So that he asks them *again*, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. This was partly the influence of numbers. A man alone may be

often easily deterred from an evil action. But it is otherwise where hand joins in hand, and the sinner is seen and supported, and stimulated or reproached, by his fellow-creatures. It shows us, also, the hardening nature of sin. When the men of Sodom were smitten with blindness, they even then groped by the wall to find the house where the heavenly visitants were. Upon the removal of each plague, when Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart. And Ahaz, in his affliction, sinned yet more and more against God. And of how many may it be said, "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return!"

—Neither means, nor even miracles, will avail, when God leaves a man to himself. Persons often think that a dreadful event will do what ordinances have failed to accomplish. But we have known many who have been stripped, and reduced; and yet their minds have not been humbled before God. They have resembled fractions of ice, or stone; broken, but not changed; each piece retaining the coldness and hardness of the mass. They think that a spectre would be much more efficacious than a preacher—Vain hope! If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

O thou God of all grace, fulfil in my experience the promise—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

APRIL 3.

"*Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.*"—John xviii. 8.

Here we see the Saviour's readiness to suffer. He makes not the least attempt to escape from the hands of his enemies; but tells them a second time that he was the victim they sought after; and yielded himself up to be bound, and led away, without murmuring or complaint. This willingness was magnified—by the greatness of his sufferings—his knowledge of all he was to endure—his deserving it not, but bearing it for others—and his power of escape.

Here we see his tenderness towards his disciples. He would not have them die or suffer; or at present, even be apprehended and alarmed. They were unable to bear it. They could not follow him now. He has the same heart still, and from this instance of his conduct, we may conclude—That he will suffer no affliction to befall his disciples, unless for some wise and useful purpose—That he will sympathize with them in their suffering—That he will afford them support and comfort—That in due time he will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Here also we see his authority and dominion over their adversaries. We are mistaken if we suppose that he presented a request, when he said, If ye seek me, let these go their way. A request would have been nothing in the present state of their minds, and provided, as they were, with officers, and an armed band of Roman soldiers. It was in the nature and force of a command. It was an absolute injunction. "I will not surrender unless these are allowed to depart. You shall not touch a hair of their head." Accordingly they make not the least objection, and suffer them to retire unmolested.

This was in character with his whole history. In his penury he always displayed his riches; in his deepest abasement he emitted some rays of his glory—The manhood was seen; but it was, so to speak, deified humanity. What majesty was combined with the humiliations of his birth—and of his death! Does he here submit? He is a conqueror, demanding his own terms, and obtaining them.

And did not this serve to enhance the sin of his disciples in denying and forsaking him? They were overcome by the fear of man. But what had they to fear? Did they not here see that their enemies were under his control; and could do nothing without his permission? Did he not here obtain for them a passport, insuring their escape and safety? Yet they have not courage and confidence enough to declare themselves on his side, and to stand by him!

And do we not resemble them? How often do we shrink back from the avowal of our principles, or turn aside from the performance of some trying duty! And wherefore? We also yield to the fear of man, that bringeth a snare. Yet what can man, what can devils, do unto us? Satan could not sift Peter, nor touch an article of Job's estate, till leave was granted him. Our foes are all chained; and the extent of their reach is determined by the pleasure of him who loved us well enough to die for us. If he careth for us, it is enough.

When shall we realize this, and go on our way rejoicing? If he says to events, Let that man succeed in his calling; opposition and difficulties are nothing—he gets forward: the blessing of the Lord maketh rich. If he says to sickness, Touch not that individual; the pestilence may walk in darkness, and the destruction rage at noon-day: a thousand may fall at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand—it shall not come nigh him. If he has any thing more for us to do or suffer, though life be holden by a rotten thread, that thread is

more than cable—we are immortal till our change comes.

"Hast thou not given thy word
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord
To keep my mortal breath,
I'll go and come,
Nor fear to die,
'Till from on high
Thou call me home."

APRIL 4.

"*Christ died for us.*"—Rom. v. 8.

So have many. All those who have paid with their lives to the injured laws of their country have died for us; and if we derive not improvement from it, the fault is our own. The world drowned in the Deluge, perished for us. The Jews, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, suffered, as the Apostle tells us, as ensamples and admonitions to us. We have buried friends and relations; but

"For us they languish, and for us they die."

That husband of *her* youth; that wife of *his* bosom; that child of *their* love—have been removed, to wean the heart from earth, and to show how frail we are.

But are we going to rank the death of Christ with such deaths as these? We would rather class it with that of an Apostle: "If I be offered," says Paul to the Philippians, "upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you." This was noble. But was Paul crucified for us?

—No—"It is *Christ* that died"—*His* death is peculiar and pre-eminent—infinitely peculiar and pre-eminent. This was indicated by the prodigies that attended it. Yet on these we shall not enlarge. Neither shall we dwell on the many touching circumstances of his death. Such a tragical representation may be derived from the history as would draw tears from every eye, while the heart may be unaffected with, and the mind even uninformed of, the grand design of his death. The question is—What was this design?

Some tell us that it was to confirm the truth of his doctrine, by the testimony of his blood; and to suffer, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. And this is true. And we believe it as fully as those who will go no further. But is this the whole, or the principal part of the design? We appeal to the Scriptures. There we learn, that He died for us, as an expiation of our guilt, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. There we see that He died for us as a sacrifice, a ransom, a substitute—that He redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us—that He once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.

—Exclude this, and the language of the Bible becomes perfectly embarrassing and unintelligible. Exclude this, and what becomes of the legal sacrifices? They were shadows without a substance: they prefigured nothing. For there is no relation between them and his death, as he was a martyr, and an example: but there is a full conformity between them and his death, as he was an atonement. Exclude this, and how are his sufferings to be accounted for at all? For he did not die for the sins of others, and he had none of his own. Where, then, is the God of judgment? That be far from Him to do after this manner; to slay the righteous with the wicked. So far the Jews reasoned well: they rejected him, for they considered him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. And so he was: but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Exclude this, and with what can we meet the conscience, burdened with guilt? With what can we answer the inquiry, How shall I come before the Lord? With what can we wipe the tear of godly grief? But we have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus. Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrow. His death was an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. The all-sufficiency, and the acceptableness, were evinced, by his discharge from the grave, and his being received up into glory.—There, within the veil, our hope finds anchorage—

"Jesus, my great High Priest,
Offer'd his blood, and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside:
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne."

Yet even this is not all the design. Christ died for us, not only to reconcile us, but to renovate; not only to justify us, but to sanctify. The one is as necessary to our recovery as the other. And both equally flow from the Cross. For he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity; and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

"Oh! the sweet wonders of that Cross,
Where God, my Saviour, groan'd and died!
My noblest life her spirit draws
From his dear wounds and bleeding side."

APRIL 5.

"*He was buried.*"—1 Cor. xv. 4.

The resurrection of our Saviour necessarily pre-supposes his death, but not his burial. His burial was an additional thing: and, as his flesh could not see corruption, *seemed* an unnecessary one—But it is worthy of our notice.

Who begged his body for interment? It was Joseph and Nicodemus. And here we

cannot help remarking these petitioners themselves. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but these men were of distinguished rank and condition in life. A few of these there have been in every age of the Church; sufficient—to show, not that the cause of God depends upon *them*, but to redeem religion from the prejudice, that it suits the vulgar only; and also to prove the power of divine grace, in counteracting temptation. Yet, down to this period, Joseph and Nicodemus had not been persons of much promise: so far from it, they were ashamed and afraid to have their regard to our Lord known, when his disciples were professing their resolution to follow him to prison and to death. Behold the change! The latter, in the hour of trial, forsake him, and flee: the former come, and openly acknowledge him. Let us all seek after more grace; but let none trust in themselves, or despise others. "The strong may be as tow;" and "the feeble may be as David." The man of whom we now think nothing, may acquire confidence and zeal; and not only pass us in the road, but leave us very far behind in attainments and usefulness. "Who hath despised the day of small things? A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

—Who attend as mourners? "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid." With us, some days elapse before interment; but here, only two hours were allowed between his execution and his burial. If, indeed, his body had not been implored by Joseph and Nicodemus, it would have been interred at Golgotha—thrown into a hole dug under the cross.

—Who carried the sacred corpse, we know not; but they had not far to bear it—"for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." This was not a grave of earth, but of stone; hewn out of a rock. Thus there was only one avenue leading to it; no one, therefore, could approach it from the sides, or behind; and the entrance was watched, guarded, and sealed. It was also a new tomb, in which never man was laid. And here, again, we see the hand of God: for had there been other bodies, some would have pretended collusion, and the evidence could not have been so simple and complete as it now was, when the body lay alone there. Finally; it was not his own. His followers are mad after the honours and riches of the world; but, living and dying, he had not where to lay his head. He was born in another man's house, and buried in another man's grave.

—But why was he buried at all? First. His burial was an additional confirmation of his death, upon which every thing depended. An examination was made while he was upon the cross; and finding him dead already, they brake not his legs; but a soldier pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water—But now his mouth, and nostrils, and ears were all filled with the odours and spices—and who can question a man's death when he is buried? Secondly. It was the completion of his humiliation. "They have brought me into the dust of death." Now that he ascended, what is it but that he descended first into the lowest parts of the earth? Thirdly. By this he sanctified the grave, and prepared it for his people. They would have been afraid to go in, but he entered it before them. They can lie in his bed, after him. He has freed it from every horror. He has softened it, and made it easy for them.

"And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre." Let us sit by them, and contemplate. *There* lies in that rock, He who made it. *There* are sealed up, the lips which said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." *There* are closed, the eyes which always beamed compassion; and wept for human wo. *There*, cold, are the hands which were laid on little children, to bless them, and that delivered the widow's son to his mother. *There* lies, the life of the world; and the hope of Israel. He was fairer than the children of men—He was the image of the invisible God—He went about doing good—He was rich, and for our sakes, became poor—

> "Come, saints, and drop a tear or two,
> For Him who groan'd beneath your load:
> He shed a thousand drops for you,
> A thousand drops of richer blood."

On the tombs of mortals, however illustrious, the humbling sentence is inscribed, "Here he *lies*." But I hear the angel saying, "Come, see the place where the Lord *lay*." He *was* dead—but is alive again—and because He lives, we shall live also—

> "Break off your tears, ye saints, and tell
> How high your great Deliv'rer reigns
> Sing how he spoil'd the hosts of hell,
> And led the monster, Death, in chains.
> Say—'Live for ever, wondrous King!
> Born to redeem, and strong to save.'
> Then ask the monster, Where 's thy sting?
> And where 's thy victory, boasting Grave?"

APRIL 6.

"*After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.*"—1 Cor. xv. 6.

As the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour is of such unspeakable importance, it cannot be too clearly, and fully ascertained. Now the way to prove a fact, is to call in evidence: and if, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established—

what shall we say, when we meet with such a cloud of witnesses as the Apostle here brings forward?—witnesses the most competent; eye-witnesses; ear-witnesses; witnesses who even handled the Word of Life—men, not of hasty credence, but slow of heart to believe; men, whose despondence was only to be done away, by proof the most undeniable, and upon which they hazarded every thing dear to them; and braved reproach, and suffering, and death.

—This interview took place in Galilee, where our Lord had principally resided, and preached, and done his wonderful works. There he was best known, and chiefly followed. Before his death, he had said, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." On the morning of his resurrection, we find the angel knew of this design; and, therefore, meeting the woman, he said, "Go quickly, and tell his disciples, that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see him; lo! I have told you." Influenced by this authority, "the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." From whence it appears, that the very spot had been named. And, from the words of the Apostle, it is certain that the disciples did not repair to it alone; but having made known among their connexions the approaching interview with a risen Saviour, they enjoyed the privilege, in company with this large assembly. "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present; but some are fallen asleep"—Every thing here is striking.

The *name*—"Brethren." O lovely distinction! When will it swallow up every other? When shall the religious world remember, that all real Christians, notwithstanding their differences, are all justified by the same blood; sanctified by the same grace; travelling the same way; heirs of the same glory; children of the same Father, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named?"

The *number*—"Above five hundred." We were not aware that he had so many adherents. In Jerusalem they could only bring together one hundred and twenty. But there were more in the country. Let us not judge of our Lord's followers by a particular place or party. Let us remember, that he has his hidden ones, whom circumstances may never bring to our notice. How surprised should we be, if any event was to draw them together from their various retreats—"These, where have they been?"—What a multitude, then, which no man can number, will there be, when they shall be all assembled, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues!

The *ravages of time*—"Some have fallen asleep." And no wonder, in the lapse of six-and-twenty years. Who has not, during such a period, been summoned to the grave to weep there? Whose heart within him has not been desolate, at the loss of friends and relations? Even the Church has not been a sanctuary from the robber and spoiler. The wise, and the good; the holy, and the useful: the followers and witnesses of the Redeemer, have finished their course, and their testimony, and have slept the sleep of death.

Distinguished preservations—"The greater part remain unto this present"—The majority of five hundred spared so many years! —When, from the numberless perils of life, it was marvellous that any *one* of them should have lived even a *week*, or a *day!* Have we survived others? Let us not ascribe it to our own care, or the goodness of our constitution; but say, with Caleb, when so many carcasses fell in the Wilderness, "The Lord hath kept me alive."

And let us be concerned, that protracted life be devoted to him, who is "the length of our days," and "the God of our salvation."

APRIL 7.

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Psalm xvi. 10, 11.

Our Lord tells us of many things concerning himself, not only in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, but in the Psalms. Some have contended, that he is immediately regarded in every passage in them. This error, arising from a noble truth carried too far, has led the holders of it to take liberties with the translation, and with the original too. We may safely follow the applications of the Holy Ghost; and we are sure, from the language of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, that in the words before us, David speaks of the Messiah, or rather introduces the Messiah himself as the speaker.

Jesus knew that he was to suffer, and die; but he knew, also, that death could not feed upon him. He knew he should be laid in the grave; but he knew, also, that he should not remain there—Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. Hell, here, does not mean the place of the miserable, but the abode of the dead. This he entered; but continued not long enough there for dissolution to commence: "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

The path of life was his passage from the sepulchre to glory; from the tomb of Joseph to the palace of the Great King. This path no one had yet trodden. Enoch, and Elias,

had entered heaven, but did not go thither from the grave. Thousands had entered heaven, but left their bodies behind. But He did not leave his body. He is therefore called, the first-born from the dead, because he was the first that entered heaven after lying in the grave. He was the first-born, too, in the dignity and influence of the life he realized. Lazarus, and the widow of Nain's son, and others, though they were revived, died again. But he, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. He lives as no one else ever lived, or ever will live. He lives, having the keys of hell and of death. He lives in the possession of all power in heaven and in earth. He lives as our Head and Representative; as the source of all spiritual influence; as the Father of the everlasting age. And he shall see his seed, and shall prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

And because he lives, we shall live also. His resurrection is the model, the cause, the proof, and the earnest, of our own. For there is a union between Christ and Christians, by which they are federally and vitally one. When, therefore, he died, they were crucified with him; and when he arose and ascended, they were quickened together with him, and raised up, and made to sit with him in the heavenly places. And though their bodies return to the dust, *they* will not see corruption *for ever*—for this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.

The believer, therefore, can also say, Thou wilt show *me* the path of life. This life means the blessedness reserved in heaven for the people of God, after the resurrection. David here describes it—In thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. It has three characters. The first regards its *source*—It flows from "his presence." He is the fountain of life, and the supreme good of the mind.

The second regards its *plenitude*—It is *fulness* of joy. In this vale of tears every pleasure has its pain, and every comfort its cross. We pursue satisfaction, but we grasp vanity and vexation. We look to Jesus, and find him the consolation of Israel. But consolation supposes trouble. His followers are described, not only by their rejoicing, but their mourning—without they have fightings, and within they have fears. They have blessed frames; and in some religious exercises, they seem to be partakers of the glory that shall be revealed. And so they are; but it is by a glimpse, a taste, a drop—the fulness is above.

The third regards its *permanency*—The pleasures are *for evermore*. Uncertainty, as well as deficiency, attaches to every thing here. We embrace our connexions, and, lo! they are gone. We set our hearts on that which is not.

If there was a possibility of the destruction, or loss of the blessedness above, we should be miserable in proportion to its greatness. From the moment of knowing it, the thought would poison all the joy. But—It is a crown of glory that fadeth not away. It is everlasting life!

APRIL 8.

"*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*"—Phil. iii. 11.

HERE the subject of consideration is, *the resurrection of the dead!* But it is obvious the Apostle does not refer to it as an event; for as an event it will be universal, and we shall be the subjects of it, whether we are willing or unwilling—for there will be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." But he refers to it as a privilege. That can hardly be called a deliverance that takes a man out of a bad condition, and consigns him to a worse. What is it for a criminal to be led out of prison to be tried, and condemned, and executed! What is it for the body to be revived, but not renovated—inheriting the principles of all the evils entailed upon it by sin, and rendered immortal for the duration of misery? The grave is better than hell. But while some will come forth unto the resurrection of damnation, others will come forth unto the resurrection of life—a resurrection that shall change the vile body, and fashion it like the Saviour's own glorious body—and complete all that the Saviour has procured for us, and the Gospel has promised to us.

With regard to the acquisition of a share in this blessedness, the Apostle makes use of language that implies—valuation—difficulty—variety—submission: "*If by any means* I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

—It implies valuation of the object. Things may be important in themselves, and not prized by those whom they concern. And we see this with regard to the blessings of the Gospel: for though they are as superior to all worldly good as the heavens are higher than the earth, yet men make light of them; and were we to judge of eternal salvation by the regard paid to it by the multitude, we should consider it a trifle unworthy a moment's serious thought. But what is it in the view of awakened souls? The "pilgrim," when leaving the City of Destruction, and implored by his friends and family to return, put his fingers in his ears, and ran, crying, Life! life! eternal life! Such wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. They hunger and thirst after

righteousness. They count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord. "Every thing," says Paul, "compared with this, is nothing." *This* is the prize of my high calling. If I miss it, I am undone for ever. If I reach it, the possession will realize all my hopes and desires—The very prospect, as I can make it my own, enlivens and cheers me in all my labours and sufferings—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

—It implies the difficulty of the acquirement. All excellent things require application and diligence; and he who rationally expects success must be *determined*, and bring his mind to exertion and endurance. What pains and patience are necessary to attain human learning! "There is no royal way to geometry." And is Divine wisdom the prey of the idle and careless? Must we labour for the meat that perisheth; and can we, without labour, obtain that meat which endureth unto everlasting life? No, says the Saviour, even in the very passage in which he speaks of "giving it"—where it is obvious, therefore, that the giving is not opposed to diligence, but desert. How readest thou? "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." "Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." But take those who, in their religion, know nothing of the privations and hardships of the soldier; nothing of the unbending alacrity of the racer; who never redeemed their time; whose day is only distinguished from their night by the substitution of sloth for sleep; who exercise no self-denial; who never mortify the deeds of the body; whose souls do not follow hard after God; would it not be perfectly absurd for one of these to say, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead?"

—It implies variety in the manner of reaching glory. This does not apply to the procuring of the blessing. This is done already. Jesus said, as he expired, "It is finished." He made peace by the blood of his cross; and brought in everlasting righteousness; and all that believe on him are justified from all things. At the Deluge people could be drowned any where; but there was only one ark. The way of salvation has been always the same from the beginning; but the methods by which this salvation is applied are various. Various are the means employed in our conversion; and various are the courses of duty in which we actually obtain the promise. All the Lord's people obey; for he is the author of eternal salvation only to them that obey him: but they are called to obey in very different ways. One is required to act the Christian in single, another in relative life. One fills a public station; another a private. Some are to receive with gratitude; others are to give with cheerfulness. Some must discharge the duties of prosperity; others those of adversity. Our sufferings, too, vary as well as our services. One glorifies God by bearing reproach and persecution; another by enduring bodily pain and infirmities. These have much outward trouble; and those more inward conflict. Each is to take up *his* cross, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. For,

Finally, it implies submission—not prescribing; not objecting; but referring every thing to the divine pleasure—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Whatever they are, I bow to them." This implicit submission is necessary, to evince the earnestness, and even sincerity of our conviction. If a patient really believes, and feels his disease and danger, he will show it by readiness to yield to the remedies the physician enjoins, however trying they may be. Here, indeed, the great contention lies with many. It does not regard the end: they would have heaven—but not by *any* means—it must be by those of their own devising or choosing. Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Jordan? May I not wash in them, and be clean? But when a man is at the point to die for ever—he will acquiesce in any means of deliverance, however mysterious to his reason, however humiliating to his pride, however adverse to his sin and sloth.

God will have the whole management of our case; or he will have nothing to do with it. And he ought to have it. The submission is an homage due to his sovereignty. We have no claim upon him; and it is mercy and grace the most wonderful, that he will save and bless us at all. We owe it, also, to his wisdom and goodness: for, though he is a Sovereign, in the exercise of his prerogative he does not act arbitrarily; but does all things well: his work is perfect. The issue, too, is such as to justify our submission to *any* means in securing it. In earthly things, the honey does not always pay for the sting; nor the rose for the thorns. But here the success will infinitely more than remunerate all our services and sacrifices. And the success also is sure. How many cases are there, in which means, any means, may be used in vain! The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. In every department of human enterprise, the successful candidates are few. Yea, the event in *no* other pursuit is infallible. But if you are like-minded with Paul, you need not fear the result. The gate of mercy was never yet shut against a returning sinner. Their heart shall live that seek God.

APRIL 9.

"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."—Rom. vi. 8.

The death and the resurrection of Christ constitute the substance of the Gospel: and our concern with them, as doctrinal truths, includes more than our admitting them into our creed. They must become internal principles, and produce in us corresponding effects. He died; and we must be dead—dead to the law; not as a rule of life, but as a covenant of works. Dead to the world: not as the scene of God's wonderful works; nor as a sphere of duty, or a field of usefulness; but as the enemy of God, and our portion. Dead to sin—This includes nothing less than our avoiding it; but it intends much more: we may be alive to it even while we forsake it. But we must no longer love, or relish it—and *thus* no longer live in it. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?

We must be dead *with him.* We are dead with him *virtually.* For he is the Head and Representative of his Church; and therefore what he did for his people is considered as done by them. We are dead with him *efficiently.* For there is an influence derived from his Cross, which mortifies us to sin; and this influence is not moral only, consisting in the force of argument and motive—though this is true; and nothing shows the evil of sin, or the love of the Saviour, like Calvary: but it is spiritual also. He died to purify, as well as to redeem; and he not only made reconciliation for the sins of the people, but received gifts for men, and secured the agency of the Holy Spirit. There is no real holiness separate from the grace of the Cross. There he draws all men unto him. We are dead with him as to *resemblance.* We are planted together in the likeness of his death; and therefore our death is called, as well as his, a crucifixion: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." I am, says the Apostle, not only dead, but crucified with Christ. That mode of dying was a painful one; and a visible one; and a gradual one; and a sure one: for the moment the body was fastened to the cross, it was as good as dead; the bones might be broken to accelerate the event, but it was never taken down alive. All this is easily applied to the crucifying of the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

But he rose, and now lives—and we shall live *with him.* That is—in consequence of his living. Because he lives, we shall live also. For we are quickened together with Christ, and are raised up, and made to sit together in heavenly places. That is—in his company. Where I am, there shall also my servant be. We have much in heaven to endear it. How delightful will it be to join our friends with all their infirmities done away—But to depart, to be with Christ, is far better. That is—in fellowship with him. We may live with another, and not live like him. We may be with another, and behold his estate, but not share it. But when he who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. I appoint unto you, says he to his disciples, a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Even our vile body shall be fashioned like his own glorious body. And the same duration attaches to his blessedness, and ours. I am alive, says he, for evermore; and our end is everlasting life.

Finally, Paul *believed* all this. And let us do the same: but let us believe it *as* he did. That is—Let us believe that we shall live with him, *if* we be dead with him. Some believe it without this. But their faith is only presumption. Whatever they rely upon, whether their knowledge, or orthodoxy, or talking, or profession; they are only preparing for themselves the most bitter disappointment—if they are not dead unto sin, and delivered from the present evil world—for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

—But let us also believe that if we be dead with him, we *shall* also live with him. The inclusion is as sure as the exclusion; and takes in every diversity, and degree of grace. Whatever be their apprehensions of themselves, none of them all shall come short of this glory. It is as certain as the promise, and oath, and covenant of God, and the death and intercession of the Saviour, and the pledges and earnests of immortality, can render it.

Therefore, be not faithless, but believing. It was used by Christians to animate and encourage each other, in the Apostles' days, as a common and familiar aphorism; and they gave it full credit: "It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him—we shall also live with him."

APRIL 10.

"The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."—1 Peter i. 11.

Connected with the sufferings of Christ there was a threefold glory.

—There was a glory that *preceded* his sufferings. This is implied in his language—"I came forth from the Father:" "I came down from heaven." But it is expressly mentioned when he says, "The glory that I had with Thee before the world began." What condescension can there be where there is no previous dignity? And what possessions can a being claim before his existence? But he was rich, and for our sakes

became poor. He was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God. He took upon him the form of a servant, and made himself of no reputation.

There was a glory that *accompanied* his sufferings. There is often much parade at the death of a monarch, and, by a show of greatness, an attempt is made to conceal or alleviate the disgrace of real littleness. But what are the suspensions of business, the splendid equipage, the tolling of bells, the solemn music, the discharge of artillery—

"He dies—the heavens in mourning stood"—

The sun was darkened. The earth shook. The rocks rent. The graves were opened. The dead arose. Spiritual trophies, blended with the prodigies of Nature. Peter's heart was broken at a look. The Centurion, watching, exclaimed, Surely this man was the Son of God. All the people that came together to that sight smote their breasts and returned. The dying thief believed with the heart, and confessed with the tongue, unto salvation; and received an assurance of an immediate place in paradise. And what a scene of moral glory was here also displayed—in his readiness to suffer; in his apology for his slumbering disciples; in the order to Peter to put up his sword; in his healing the ear of his enemy's servant; in his stipulating for the safety of his Apostles; in his confession before Pontius Pilate; in his bearing without resentment the mocking, the spitting, the scourging; in his sympathy with the weeping daughters of Jerusalem, in his way to Calvary; in his tender concern for his widowed mother, on the cross; in his prayer for his murderers—Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!—where shall we end? Here, Celsus endeavours to turn his glory into shame. Having represented him as despitefully used, arrayed in purple robes, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the tree; he cries out, in the name of wonder, Why, on this occasion at least, does he not act the God? and hurl some signal vengeance on the authors of his insults and anguish? But, O thou Enemy! he does act the God. Any madman on earth, or fury in hell, is capable of anger, and wrath, and revenge—But to bear the most shocking provocations, and, though commanding the thunder and the flame, forbear to punish, and only pity!—If it be the glory of a man to pass by a transgression; and the noblest triumph to overcome evil with good; he died gloriously, beyond all example. Yes—says even a Rousseau: If the death of Socrates was the death of a sage, the death of Jesus was the death of a God.

There was also a glory that *followed* his sufferings. From the clouds that had concealed him, he issues forth in all the radiance of immortality, declared to be the Son of God with power, by the Spirit of holiness, in his resurrection from the dead. An angel descends, and rolls away the door of the sepulchre, and sits in glory upon it; and shakes the ground; and causes the Roman guards to flee for fear. His disciples are re-animated, and re-assembled, to whom, also, he showed himself alive, after his passion, by many infallible signs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. See him ascend into heaven, far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. Were there glories on the day of Pentecost? *He* shed forth that which was seen and heard. He filled the Apostles with the Holy Ghost, according to his promise, so that they spake with new tongues, and all the people heard, in their own language, the wonderful works of God. And three thousand were converted under one sermon. All the miracles his servants performed were done in his Name, and were rays of his glory. The establishment of the Gospel then, and the spread of it ever since, and every soul called by grace, is a part of the joy set before him, wherein he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.

And, oh! the glories that are yet to follow—when the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of the Lamb! when he shall sprinkle many nations! when all nations shall fall down before him, and all kings shall serve him! And, oh! the glories that are yet to follow, when his mediation shall be completely accomplished, and he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe: and attract every eye, and fill every heart, and employ every tongue, for ever!

Saviour Jesus! may I be with thee where thou art, to behold thy glory!

APRIL 11.

"*In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree.*"—Zech. iii. 10.

Thus Inspiration characterizes the reign of the Messiah—It was to be distinguished by three things.

The First, Is *enjoyment*. The very image is delightful. Vines and fig-trees were much prized in the East. They afforded at once delightful fruit for the taste, and refreshing shade from the heat. Persons therefore regaled themselves under their branches and leaves; and thus the expression in time came to signify happiness. And what said our Lord to his disciples? Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Because Christians do not run to the same excess of riot with others; and turn their back

on the pleasures of sin, and the dissipations of the world; many think they are mopish and melancholy. But blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. It was so in the beginning of the Gospel. Wherever it came, it was received as good news, as glad tidings; and it was said of the receivers, that they walked not only in the fear of the Lord, but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. It not only relieved, but delighted them. It not only tranquillized them, but inspired them with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Have we the same Gospel? Or do we embrace it properly, if, instead of being thus *blessed*, it leaves us in a dungeon of gloom, the victims of sadness, and care, and apprehension?

The Second, Is *liberty*. Slaves and captives did not sit under their vines and fig-trees. Nor did proprietors in time of war. When invaded, they were liable to the surprises of the enemy. Then the inhabitants disappeared from these loved, but no longer safe retreats; and longed for the time when, released from perils and alarms, they should go forth with joy, and repose and refresh themselves again. Therefore, Rab-shakeh, to urge the Jews to a surrender, said, "Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern." Hence we read, There was peace all the days of Solomon: and from Dan to Beer-sheba the people sat every man under his vine and under his fig-tree. But a greater than Solomon is here. In "His days shall Israel be saved, and Judah shall dwell safely." What have his subjects to fear? If God be for us, who can be against us? What shall separate us from the love of God? Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Christians may therefore give up themselves to holy confidence. Their souls may dwell at ease. They are free indeed. They are kept by the power of God. They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. Let them realize this; and feel a peace that passeth all understanding, keeping their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Let them say, "I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

The Third, Is *benevolence*. Ye shall *call* every man *his neighbour* under the vine, and under the fig-tree. There is nothing like selfishness here—they are anxious that others should partake of their privileges. There is no envy here—there is no room for it. Here is enough not only for themselves, but for their neighbours—and for all of them.

And if we are Christians indeed, our happiness, instead of being impaired by the experience of others, will be increased by it. Let us therefore remember the lepers. They had discovered plenty, and were regaling themselves, while their fellow-citizens were perishing with famine in Samaria. But conscience smote them, and "they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." Thus the first subjects of Christianity said to the spiritually destitute and dying, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Cursed be the temper of the elder brother that turned wretched at the tears of joy that bedewed the beard of an aged father, and the ecstasies of a family thrown into transport at the return and reception of the prodigal. Let me resemble in every feeling of my soul those happy beings who rejoice in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth. Let me invite all that come within my reach to that mercy which I have found. Let me say, O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him. And let me do this not only by my lips, but by all my temper, and all my conduct—holding forth the word of life.

APRIL 12.

"*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"—Rom. iii. 24.

HERE we have an answer to the most important and interesting of all inquiries—"How shall man be just with God?"

To be justified is to be acquitted from the charge brought against us, and absolved from the condemnation with which we were threatened. With regard to us, the condemnation was deserved, and the charge was true. This renders the case so difficult and peculiar; and calls for the Apostle's development.

But in exposing the source of the privilege, he seems to use a tautology—"Being justified *freely by his grace*." If it be done freely, it must be of grace: and if it be gracious, it must be free. Yet this is not saying too much. Paul knew that men were proud, and vain: and that, as Simon Magus thought of purchasing the Holy Ghost with money, so they, in dealing with God about their souls, wish to be merchants, rather than suppliants; and would seem to buy, while they are compelled to beg. But, surely, if it be not saying too much, it is saying enough. Surely, after this, the freeness and graciousness of the thing cannot be questioned. It is not only

free and gracious, as opposed to constraint, but as opposed to worthiness. Merit in a sinner, is impossible—*his* desert lies all on the other side. *There* he is worthy—and worthy of death. A man, who asks a favour, may have no claim upon you; but you may also have no demand upon him; and, therefore, though you may justly refuse him, yet you have no right to apprehend, and punish him. But God has a right to punish, and destroy *us;* and it is of his mercies that *we* are not consumed. It is also free and gracious, as opposed to *desire.* This is undeniable, with regard to the constitution and accomplishment of the plan itself—for these long preceded even our being. But is it true, with regard to the application of it? The Publican prayed, God be merciful to me a sinner: and went down to his house justified. And you sought, and found. But what induced you to seek? A sense of your want of the blessing. But how came you to feel this, after being so long insensible of it? Hearing such a preacher. But who made this preacher, and sent him, and placed him in your way, and applied what he said to your heart?—And the same may be asked, with regard to any other instrumentality. Go as far back as you please; when you arrive, you will find Him there before you, with all his preparations and excitements; and will hear Him say, as you approach, "Come, for all things are now ready."

But the Apostle tells us of the medium of the privilege—"Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And it is obvious *he* did not deem this inconsistent with the former. He knew that it was still freely by his grace. It was with God to determine whether the law should take its course, or the penalty be transferred to the surety: for the sentence was, "The soul that sinneth *it* shall die." It was, therefore, an instance of his sovereign grace, to admit a substitute. Besides, if he required reparation, he himself provided the Lamb for a burnt offering. Herein "God hath commended his *love* toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us:" and hence the exclamation, "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We have an illustration of this, in the case of Job's friends. They had displeased God; and yet he was willing that they should be reconciled. *He* therefore ordered a proceeding that should be available: "Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly." The sacrifice, and the intercession of Job, did not *dispose* God to show them mercy, for he prescribed them; but they were the way in which he chose to exercise it. And thus, "*He* laid on him the iniquities of us all." "*He* made him, who knew no sin, to be a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This redemption, therefore, is the effect of his goodness. He loved his own Son, *because* he laid down his life for us; and highly exalted him, *because* he was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

We cannot say too much of God's mercy—this is the origin of all our hopes. But, surely, he had a right to determine the way in which it should be extended towards those who had no claims upon it: and of the propriety of the way, both with regard to himself and also with regard to us, he was the only competent judge. And, therefore, if he has appointed a way, and revealed it in his word; ignorance, pride, or rebellion only can lead us to oppose or neglect it; and wretchedness and ruin must be the sure result of it. If we could not see the reasonableness of the dispensation, yet, if He has declared that it "became him," we should be bound to acquiesce and adore. But we can see that he has herein abounded towards us, in all wisdom and prudence; that here, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; that the law is magnified, and made honourable; that sin is condemned in the flesh; that God is just, while he justifies the ungodly who believeth in Jesus; and that every end that could have been answered by the destruction of the sinner has been equally—better—infinitely better answered by the death of the Saviour.

And now what wait we for? We are accepted in the Beloved. Let us come in his Name. Let us draw near in full assurance of faith. Let us joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. And let us not conceal, but zealously and gladly make known the blessedness that has brought us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

APRIL 13.

"*Upon one stone shall be seven eyes.*"
Zech. iii. 9.

The Lord Jesus is often called a stone; and seldom without some attribute of distinction. Thus Peter calls him, "A living stone;" and Isaiah, "A tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." And here the use of him is announced. He is the basis to sustain the complete salvation of the Church of God, which is his house; his temple. Of such a structure how great would be the fall! The crash would be heard beyond the stars. But what can bear up for ever the weight of such an edifice? Our worthiness, and works? Our righteousness, and strength? Better would the sliding sand, the leaf of

autumn, the down of the thistle, support St. Paul's cathedral, or one of the pyramids of Egypt, or the pillars of the earth. But He is infinitely equal to the importance of his station: and whoso believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

But let us observe the notice he was to excite and engage—Upon one stone shall be seven eyes. Seven is not to be taken here literally. It is what the Jews call a perfect number; and is designed to indicate a great multitude. Thus God says, If ye walk contrary to me, I also will walk contrary to you, and will punish you seven times for your iniquities; that is, often and severely. Shall I forgive my brother, says Peter, until seven times?

Let us look at a *little* of the accomplishment.—The eye of God was upon him. No finite understanding can conceive the complacency He had in contemplating him, while achieving the redemption of his people, and finishing the work that was given him to do—"In whom," says He, "my soul delighteth."

—We read of an innumerable company of angels—The eyes of these were upon him. He was seen of angels. They announced, and carolled his birth. They ministered to him in the wilderness.

"Through all his travels here below
They did his steps attend;
Oft gaz'd, and wonder'd where at last,
The scene of love would end.

"Around the bloody tree
They press'd, with strong desire
That wond'rous sight to see—
The Lord of Life expire;
And, could their eyes have known a tear,
Had dropp'd it there, in sad surprise."

—The eye of Satan was upon him. He watched him through life, hoping to make a prey of him, as he had done of the first Adam. But here was the Lord of heaven. And he found nothing in him.

—The eyes of men were upon him. Simeon saw him, and wished to see nothing else. *Blind* Bartimæus saw *him*, and followed him in the way. Judas saw him closely, for three years, and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood. Pilate saw him judicially, and said, I am pure from the blood of that just man. The Centurion watched him in death, and said, This man was the Son of God. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. Mary, his mother, was standing by the cross—*She* saw him; and what were her emotions when she viewed the head, that had oft reposed upon her bosom, fall upon his shoulder, and yielding up the ghost! After his resurrection, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Have not I seen Christ? says Paul: yes; and even at mid-day he shone above the brightness of the sun.

—And, how many thousands and millions have seen him since!—not with the eye of the body, but of the mind; not with the eye of sense, but of faith. Indeed this is the grand essential: "He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life." The one single design of the Gospel and all the ordinances of religion, is to bring the eyes of men to fix upon him; for there is salvation in no other. He, therefore, cries, "Behold me! behold me!" Every minister endeavours only to awaken attention to him; saying, with John, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"

—Ah! Christians, it is your grief, not that you are so little known and regarded, but that so few eyes are upon him. But more are viewing him than you are aware of. And, soon, Jews shall look upon him whom they have pierced; and Gentiles shall come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him.

—And, in another world, he is all in all. There he draws every eye, and employs every tongue. There his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his Name shall be on their forehead. O glorious hope! It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall SEE HIM AS HE IS.

APRIL 14.

"*The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.*"—Lam. iv. 20.

THE words are spoken of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. And two things are to be noticed and improved. First, How his people regarded him—they called him "The breath of their nostrils." That is, he seemed as dear and necessary, as the air they respired. How prone are we to make too much of creatures! To love them properly is a duty; to over-value them, is folly and sin. Yet even Christians are in danger of this, according to the Apostle John—"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." And who can cast stones at Zedekiah's subjects? Is there no being who is the breath of our nostrils? Have we never made flesh our arm? Never said of a child, "This same shall comfort us?" Never called gold our hope?—What is all sin, but a departure from God; a transferring of that fear, and confidence, and dependence, and homage to the creature, which are due to the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore? Religion is nothing but a compliance with the demand—"My son, give *me* thine heart."

Secondly; observe how he disappointed them. They reposed their trust in him, and

expected that under his empire they should enjoy security and happiness among the surrounding nations: "We said of him, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen: but he was taken in their pits,"—Alluding to his unsuccessful effort to escape, when Jerusalem was broken up: "all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the King's garden: but the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him." Thus painfully were their hopes deceived: and their idol, instead of defending and blessing them, was himself bereaved, and blinded, and imprisoned for life: "And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." Thus liable are we to disappointment, when we confide in creatures. "The inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem." "Behold," says Hezekiah, "for peace I had great bitterness."

The young are peculiarly exposed here, owing to their ignorance, and inexperience. Yet the older are not always wise. But we are the authors of our own disappointments. We disregard the notices of history, and observation, and the word of truth; and look for that from creatures which they are neither designed nor able to afford. There is no assurance of the continuance of any earthly possessions or enjoyments: they are liable to outward violence: they are corruptible in their qualities: they perish in the using. And there is not only a physical, but a moral uncertainty in their duration: for when we look to them rather than God, God will either take them away, that we may make him the only strength of our heart, and our portion for ever; or, if he leaves them, he will take away the comfort from them, and render them our rebukes. For whatever we make the means of our forsaking or forgetting God, God will make the instrument of chastising us. We may therefore often read our sin in our sufferings: and it will be well if the remnant of Israel no more shall stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Many have had reason to say, It is good for me that I have been afflicted. The dispensation that removed a creature introduced them to the God of all grace: and the Valley of Achor became the door of hope. And so it has been, not only in the commencement, but in the progress of the divine life. The Lord's people have been enriched by their worldly losses; and in the failures of human dependences, they have taken a fresh hold of his arm, and said, "I will trust, and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." A good man being observed to be as cheerful in adversity as he had been in prosperity, assigned as a reason—when I had every thing about me, I enjoyed God in all; and now I have nothing, I enjoy all in God. And happy he, who when he abounds, can say, with the poet,

> "To thee we owe our wealth and friends:
> Our health, and safe abode:
> Thanks to thy Name for meaner things;
> But they are not my God:"

And who, when he is abased, can say, with the Prophet; "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

APRIL 15.

"*Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*
Matt. xxvi. 56.

Let us look at this lamentable fact, in connexion with the disciples, the Saviour, and ourselves.

—With regard to the *disciples*, it shows us their weakness and depravity. They fled, from fear; but their fear was needless. He had stipulated for their safety, when he surrendered himself in the Garden: "If, therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, Of them which Thou hast given me, I have lost none." They were under great obligations to him. He had done much for them in calling them by his grace, and dignifying them with the Apostleship. And he was now going to bleed and die for them. And they had professed a great attachment to him: for when Peter said, Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee; so said all the disciples. Yet they all forsook him, and fled! Lord, what is man!

Yet this culpable cowardice was overruled for good. For their very declension made their witness, after his resurrection, the more unexceptionably credible; and the weakness of their faith has proved the strengthening of ours. They were not persons of hasty belief. They had doubted, and for the time abandoned the cause, saying, "We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel:" and were repairing to their former homes and callings. What could have rallied them, and brought them back, and inspired them with courage to go forth, and bear re-

proach, and persecution, and death, in his Name, but a conviction that nothing could resist!

—With regard to the *Saviour*, this was a part, and a very trying part of his abasement and passion. A friend is born for adversity. Then his presence, his sympathy, his countenance, is peculiarly desirable and necessary. Common humanity says, To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed of his friend —But *he* looked for some to take pity, and there was none, and for comforter, and he found none. These men had been three years with him: they could have borne witness to his freedom from sedition; his innocency; his piety. They could have cheered him by their standing at his side; and their determination to suffer with him. But one betrayed him; another denied him: and all forsook him, and fled. Behold, and see, if ever there was sorrow like unto his sorrow!—Yet he foresaw, and foretold this: "The hour cometh, and is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." This enhanced his anguish. He suffered in the apprehension, as well as in the reality. But it also enhanced his love. He was not drawn into any part of his suffering by ignorance, or surprise—he knew all—all was before him—but he turned not his back.

—With regard to *ourselves*, it may teach us not to sink, or wonder, if we should be deserted by those from whom we had reason to look for better things. Did not one tell David, "Behold, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom!" And did not he groan —"It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company?" Did not Job complain —"My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish; when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place?" Did not Paul say—"At my first answer, no man stood by me, but all men forsook me—I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge!" Above all, "lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds," consider the Lord Jesus. Is the servant above the master? or the disciple above his Lord!

APRIL 16.

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."—John xiv. 18.

These tender words are part of our Saviour's farewell address to his disciples, immediately after the Holy Supper.

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We see in them his kindness. These disciples had shown many defects, and had very little improved any of their advantages; but loving his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end. They were now going to prove themselves very unworthy: and he foresaw, and foretold, what, according to their present views and feelings, seemed perfectly incredible to themselves—that they would all forsake him in the hour of trial, notwithstanding their obligations, and professions. They were going to leave *him* comfortless, as far as it depended upon them; and to induce him to complain—"I looked for some to take pity, and there was none, and for comforter, and I found none." But—much as they deserved it—"I will not," says he, "leave *you* comfortless." "I will"—not to punish, or upbraid, but to relieve, and encourage—"I will come to you."

Here, also, we perceive his greatness. When we are going away from our connexions to some distant place, we may speak of our return; but it must be conditionally. We are not sure of the event; it does not depend upon us; and we ought always to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." But when we die, we know our return is impossible; and our friends know it, and weep most of all that they will see our faces no more. The dying pastor cannot say to his anxious flock, I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you, and again feed you with the Bread of Life. The dying father cannot say to his family, mourning around his bed, I will come again and provide for you. One of the most touching circumstances in the beautiful lines of Cowper, on his mother's picture, is the delusion employed to comfort him—

> "Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,
> Oft gave me promise of thy quick return:
> What ardently I wish'd, I long believed;
> And, disappointed still, was still deceived.
> By disappointment every day beguiled,
> Dupe of *to-morrow* even from a child—
> Thus many a sad to-morrow came, and went,
> 'Till, all my stock of infant sorrow spent,
> I learn'd, at last, submission to my lot;
> But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot."

And—the same lesson we must all learn, with regard to every dear delight we here enjoy. The departing Joseph said unto his brethren, "I die; and God will surely visit you." He does not say, I will visit you—he knew he was going the way whence he could not return. But Divinity *here* speaks, as well as friendship. "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." This is the language, not only of fore-knowledge, but of sovereign dominion: the language of one who had the keys of hell, and of death: of one who said, No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself—I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. Even death would not interrupt his goodness.

His entering another world would not affect his intercourse with his people in this. His presence with them was not confined to his bodily residence. While on earth, he said, "The Son of man who is in heaven." And now, though in heaven, he is no less on earth. Lo! said he, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

—And can we help perceiving, here, how indispensable he is to the happiness of his people? The disciples were comfortless in the view of his absence; and it is easy to account for this, both from their attachment to him, and from the pleasure and profit they had derived from him. We feel, and tremble, and groan, at parting with a friend, or relation. What must the feelings of the disciples have been, at the thought of losing *him!* They would be left in the world, like sheep without their shepherd; like travellers in a wilderness, without their guide; like orphans, bereaved of the father's care, and the mother's bosom. And what could comfort them, but the promise of *himself* again? Had he said, I will not leave you comfortless, I will send you riches, and honours; princes shall be your friends, and angels your servants—what would all this have been, without the assurance, "*I* will come to you?" But this is sufficient. Here is a resource equal to the exigency; a consolation adequate to all the distress.

The good found in creatures is always finite, and very limited. It is also much dispersed, so that we must apply to many, to contribute their part to make up one comfort. The happiness we derive from creatures is like a beggar's garment—it is made up of pieces, and patches, and is worth very little after all. But the blessedness we derive from the Saviour is single, and complete. In him all fulness dwells. He is coeval with every period. He is answerable to every condition. He is a physician, to heal; a counsellor, to plead; a king, to govern; a friend, to sympathise; a father, to provide. He is a foundation, to sustain; a root, to enliven; a fountain, to refresh. He is the shadow from the heat; the bread of life; the morning star; the sun of righteousness—all, and in all. No creature can be a substitute for him; but he can supply the place of every creature. He is all my salvation, and all my desire. My hope, my peace, my life, my glory, and joy.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. I cannot be exposed; I cannot be friendless; I cannot be poor; I cannot be fearful; I cannot be sorrowful—with Thee.

"If Thou, my Jesus, still art nigh,
Cheerful I live, and cheerful die;
Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
To find ten thousand worlds in Thee."

APRIL 17.

"Behold, I will engrave the graving thereof saith the Lord of hosts."—Zech. iii. 9.

This is spoken of the stone, upon which were to be seven eyes, and which intends the Messiah, the foundation laid in Zion.

To engrave, is to pierce and cut. When he became a man of sorrows; when he said, Reproach hath broken my heart; when he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair; when the crown of thorns entered his temples, and the nails his hands and feet, and the spear his side—then, O my soul, was the Scripture fulfilled.

As there is no engraving without wounding, so to engrave is to embellish and beautify. And he was made perfect through suffering. Hence, "I do cures," said he, "to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." Hence he calls the season of his passion the hour in which he was to be "glorified." Hence he adds, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And the richest display of his graces; and the acquirement of the dispensation of the Spirit; and the dominion he exercises in our nature; and the prerogative of judging the world in righteousness; and the praises he will inhabit through eternal ages—all these resulted from his sufferings, according to the language of divine prophecy, and history—"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." "Because he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath exalted him, and given him a name above every name."

And as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. To a person unacquainted with the process, the pruning of the tree; the cleaving of the ground with the ploughshare; the operation of the chisel on the stone; would look like an effort to injure or destroy. But look at the thing afterwards. Behold the vine, adorned with purple clusters. Survey the field, yielding the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear. Examine the carved work when the sculptor has achieved his design, and fixed it in the proper place!

—Christians are sometimes perplexed, and discouraged, because of their trials. They know not what God is doing with them. They fear he is angry, and going to crush and destroy. But they are his workmanship. He is preparing them for their destination in the temple of his grace. These trials are applied to qualify and advance them. They

will only perfect that which concerneth them. Howard was taken by the enemy, and confined in prison. There he learned the heart of a captive: and this experience originating in his suffering, excited and directed his thoughts, and led him into all his extraordinary course of usefulness and fame. It is good for me, says David, that I have been afflicted. I know, says Paul, that this shall turn to my salvation. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

APRIL 18.

"*Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*"—Matt. xiii. 33.

We may consider the kingdom of heaven, as intending the empire of the Gospel in the world; and also the empire of grace in the heart.

Let us confine our attention to the latter.

The leaven in the meal is a foreign importation. It is not naturally in the meal, nor derived from it. It is the same with Divine grace. Though it resides in us, it does not arise from us: for in our natural state dwelleth no good thing—It is altogether a new production; and so alien is it from the man himself, who is the subject of it, that the introduction of the principle occasions a ferment, or contest, that lasts for life—the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

The leaven in the meal is active, and operating. There it works; and evinces its residence by its agency. And the grace of God, —Is this a dead, powerless thing? Is it a notion? Or a principle! We read of the work of faith; the labour of love; the patience of hope. The same may be said of repentance: "What carefulness it *wrought* in you; yea, what zeal! yea, what revenge!" I will show thee, says James, my faith by my works: I will show thee the sun, by its shining; and the spring, by the streams. Faith justifies the soul; but works justify faith, and prove it to be of the operation of God.

The leaven is assimilating. It converts; it changes—not by destroying the substance of the meal, but altering the quality; communicating its own property, tincture, relish. It is the same here. We are transformed by the renewing of the mind. The man remains physically the same as he was before: the same in his relations, talents, condition, business—Yet he is another man; a new man. He is evangelized. He has something of the holy and heavenly nature of divine truth in him. If the grace of God be light, it enlightens him. If salt, it seasons him. If glory, it glorifies him. If leaven, it leavens him.

The operation of the leaven is gradual. The effect in the meal is not produced at once; but by degrees. And do we not read of being renewed day by day! of going from strength to strength! of being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord! the work would want the evidence of analogy, if it were instantaneous. In the family, we see children becoming young men; and young men becoming fathers. In the field, we see, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. Some are not sensible of their religious advancement; and the reason is, they judge by the growing, rather than by the growth. The one escapes us; the other is perceptible. Were you to stand by the side of the most rapidly growing plant, you would not see it grow; but you would see when it was grown. Thus judge yourselves, and see whether there is not an increase in your convictions of sin, and the vanity of the world, and the preciousness of the Saviour.—Thus look at your dispositions; your dependence; your taste; your diligence; your self-denial, in the service and ways of God.

The influence of the leaven is diffusive. Commencing from the centre, it reaches, in due time, to the extremities, and penetrates every particle of the meal. The grace of God is lodged in the heart; but it is not confined there. It reaches all the powers of the man's mind, and all the senses of his body. It enters all his situations, and circumstances in life. It affects him in the field; in the shop; in the family; in all his connexions; in all his civil and common actions; and whether he eats, or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God.

—And, as the leaven ultimately attains its object, and leavens the whole—so here the issue of the grace of God will be universal and complete holiness. It will sanctify us wholly—body, soul, and spirit. It will perfect that which concerneth us. And the result is sure, even now. How small soever the leaven is, compared with the mass, the less will prevail, and subdue the greater. The dawn will chase away the night, and blaze in full day. "He which hath begun a good work, will perform it: let us not despise, therefore, the day of small things, either in ourselves or others."

APRIL 19.

"*We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*"—1 John iii. 16.

In the beginning of the Gospel this test of love was frequently required: and Christians not only dared to be companions of them that suffered, but were ready to suffer for them

So Paul testifies of Priscilla and Aquila, his helpers in Christ: "Who," says he, "have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles." It is well the providence of God does not call *us* to such a severe trial. But surely the principle requires us to be ready to do *every thing in our power* on their behalf; and will not allow us to refuse any *service* or *sacrifice* for our brethren, however *arduous*.

We may do much for their minds; by dissipating their doubts, removing their fears, and bringing them comfort in their spiritual distresses. Thus Jonathan went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. A Christian is self-suspicious, and is afraid of every conclusion in his own favour drawn by himself. He sees not the consolation to which he is entitled, though so near him; but another, like the Angel to Hagar, may open his eyes, and show him the well. Sometimes he is cast down, supposing many things are peculiar to himself; especially those painful feelings which arise from the assaults of Satan, and his conflict with indwelling sin, more and more of which he is continually discovering. But you can relieve him by opening your own experience, and letting him know that it is so with you. There is another important case: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

What can be dearer to a man than reputation! A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches: but it may be injured various ways. And surely we ought to be alive to a brother's character; and willingly throw ourselves between him and the strife of tongues. When any thing is said to his disparagement, we should show that charity, which rejoiceth not in iniquity; but hopeth all things. We should frown away the slander of insinuation. We should not allow a relater to go on, without inquiring whether he will allow us to name it to the person aggrieved, or to the person from whom he affirms he has derived it. What a world of calumny and miscnief would this single expedient prevent! He that helps not in the circulation of the report, yet, if he pleasingly, or even patiently, sits to hear it, shares half the blame: and, as Dr South says, the tale-bearer and the tale-hearer should be both hanged up, back to back, only the one by the tongue, and the other by the ear.

The body may need help. And our Saviour bore our infirmities, and sicknesses, by compassion and sympathy. *His* commiseration could bear them away from the sufferers. We cannot perform miracles. But we may be useful by medical aid, and by personal attendance, and succour. And where the malady cannot be removed, the enduring may be alleviated. Is it nothing to the patient, that you visit him in his affliction? that he sees you at the side of the bed of languishing? that, by your tears and prayers, you are answering to the address—Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends! for the hand of God hath touched me!

The estate of our brethren may call for assistance; and is to be relieved according to our ability. It will be as base in us as unprofitable to them, to say, Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled; while we give them not those things which are needful to the body. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Job could say, The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. It was the saying of our Lord, It is more blessed to give than to receive. It was the glory of Christianity, in its first powerful effect, that none who embraced it "lacked." As glory in heaven, and as grace on earth, so the blessings of Providence were free and open to all. The property of Christians went along with their affections; "and distribution was made to every one as he had need." And so tender were they of each other, that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." "Oh, this is no rule for us." Well; take it and interpret it in your own way. Yet, will not—what even *you* infer from it as a duty, include much more than is now found in the temper and practice of Christians? "But we are not able."—This is commonly the language of those who *are* able, but not willing. Some *incapacitate* themselves. A decent distinction above the vulgar will not satisfy them: they must be splendid in dress, and luxurious in table, and magnificent in furniture. Others are disabled by hoarding. If accumulation be not condemned by Christianity, the extent of it is. A man may decently provide for his family, without wishing to leave them in the snares of affluence, and with a heap, which if they do not dissipate by vice and excess, they are likely only to be concerned to enlarge. And may not persons increase their powers of beneficence, by diligence, and economy, and *self-denial?* And is not self-denial the first lesson in the school of Christ? And you know the grace of Him, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you, through his poverty, might be rich.—"WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE BRETHREN."

APRIL 20.

"*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly.*"—Luke xxii. 44.

And what must this agony have been, when it is added, that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground!" What, my soul, could have caused this!

"Oh, what wonders love has done!
But how little understood!
God well knew, and God alone,
What produced that sweat of blood.
Who can thy deep wonders see,
Wonderful Gethsemane?"

—But let us now observe his deportment. For we are not only to view him in his passion as our Mediator, but as also suffering for us, to leave us an example that we should follow his steps—"In his agony, he prayed more earnestly." Not that he was cold and formal before in his devotions: but as the hour and power of darkness advanced, and he began to be sore amazed and very heavy; and his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; there was more excitement in his feelings and vehemency in his manner of expression—Now were the days of his flesh, in which, with strong cryings and tears, he made supplications to Him, who was able to save him from death. So it is to be with us. Prayer is never out of season. We see this in the life of Jesus. On what occasion did he pray? But there is a time when it is specially seasonable. Therefore says God, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." Prayer is the design, the refuge, the solace, the improvement of affliction: and the greater the distress and anguish we are in, the more necessary will it be, both for our sanctification and support—Let us, therefore, be the more importunate. In the greatness of our distress,

—Let us not, like Adam and Eve, flee, and endeavour to hide ourselves from God—but pray.

—Let us not, like Cain, begin to build, and try, by worldly projects, to dissipate our grief—but pray.

—Let us not, like Jonah, fret under the loss of our gourds, and tell God himself, that we do well to be angry, even unto death—but pray.

—Let us not, like Ephraim and Judah, repair to creatures: "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wounds, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal them, or cure them of their wound"—but pray.

—Let us not, like Saul, who went to the Witch of Endor, repair to the Devil himself, by error, drunkenness, and sin—but pray.

—Let us not, like Ahithophel and Judas, have recourse to suicide, and plunge into hell, for relief—but pray. Let us say, with the Church, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up;" or, with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in *Him*."

"I seem forsaken and alone,
I hear the lions roar,
And every door is shut, but one,
And that is Mercy's door.

"*There*, till the dear Deliverer comes,
I'll wait, with humble prayer:
And, when he calls his exile home,
The Lord shall find me *there*."

APRIL 21.

"*Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.*"—Matt. xxviii. 5.

This was the address of an angel to Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, that had come to see the sepulchre before break of day. They were last at the cross, and first at the tomb. Favours are given sovereignly by the Lord, but honour is conferred according to a rule; and the rule is this—"Them that honour me, I will honour." These women were informed of his resurrection before the Apostles. The Apostles received the intelligence from them; but they received it from an angel. At first, these pious visitants were afraid. And what wonder, when we consider—that they were females—that all their sensibilities were alive—that they were in the garden of another—that they were alone—that the earth was reeling under them—that the guards were fleeing, and perhaps shrieking—that it was early in the morning—and the remaining darkness rendered more visible and awful the Divine messenger sitting at the door of the tomb—his countenance as lightning, and his raiment white as snow! But, says the angel, "*You* have nothing to apprehend from *me*. He is my master, as well as your Saviour. I serve him whom ye seek; and having attended his resurrection, I now announce it to you. He is not here; he is risen, as he said—Step forward—Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

And it is true in its most extended application, that they who seek Jesus Christ which was crucified, have really nothing to fear whatever at first may dismay them.

But who are entitled to this assurance? Do you feel your need of him as once you did not, for all the purposes of salvation? Have you desires after him—so peculiar that nothing else can satisfy them—so powerful as to make you willing to part with whatever stands in competition with him? Are you determined to press through all difficulties? Are you found in the use of all the means which he has appointed? Are you submissively asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? depending on the aid of his Holy Spirit? and looking for his mercy unto eternal life? If you can answer these questions in the affirmative, *I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.*

—And I also know, that ye have nothing to *fear*. "Fear not *ye*."—Fear not that you have a graceless heart—the very seeking is a token for good. It cannot be the effect of Nature—that which is of the flesh, is flesh; but that which is of the Spirit, is spirit. They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.—Fear not that your search will be successless. Had he a mind to kill you, he would not have shown you such things as these. His aim in making you sensible of your condition, was not to render you miserable, but to endear himself; and to draw forth your souls after him. You shall not be disappointed. You may be tried, but he will appear to your joy. Did any ever seek him in vain? Can he deny himself? They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.—Fear not, that you shall fall under the power of any evil. From what evil are you not secured? Is it temporal want? The young lions may lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Is it the penalty of the Law? He has redeemed you from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for you. Is it sin? Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace. Is it the world? This is the victory that overcometh the world; even our faith. Is it Satan? The God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet, shortly. Is it death? He has abolished death. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory! "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

APRIL 22.

"*It came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.*"—Numb. x. 35, 36.

We might have expected that *Aaron* would have done this, as he was the high priest. But Moses was the leader and commander of the people; and he was not offering sacrifice, or burning incense—in which he would have offended: but performing a duty of natural, as well as revealed religion. This is binding upon all; and especially upon public men. Thus Solomon, though a king, kneeled on a scaffold of wood at the dedication of the temple; and led himself the prayers of the nation. Princes, officers, magistrates, masters of families, should all be men of prayer. Relative, as well as personal claims, bind them to the duty.

It would seem that Moses, always on these occasions, employed the same terms. Our Lord also, in the garden, prayed three times, saying the same words. It is obvious from hence, that whatever advantages extemporaneous prayer possesses—and it has many—yet forms of prayer cannot be in themselves improper, in public or in private.

As Moses thus addressed God at the commencement, and the conclusion of every march—does it not behove us to acknowledge Him in all our ways? and with prayer to begin and end every day? every meal! every ordinance? every enterprise! every journey? every going out and every coming in?

Especially let us think of those short and sublime addresses in our travelling heavenward, through this wilderness world.

Here is the marching prayer—"Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." That is—"Before we move, we commend ourselves to thy guidance, and guardian care, and almighty agency. We are passing not only through strange, but hostile regions. There are foes, open or concealed, which would hinder our progress—rob us—wound us—destroy us. But we are thy charge, and engaged in thy cause. They that hate us hate thee. Our enemies are *thy* enemies. And formidable as they are, Thou canst as easily vanquish them as the sun, rising in his strength, can disperse the shadows that seem to oppose his march." Let us realize this, and we shall feel enough to animate us to go forward, though men, though devils, beset our path. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear! The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid! Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

Here is the resting prayer—"Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel." That is—If *Thou* goest on, in vain we are left. What can we do without thee in our encampment, any more than in our march?

Thy presence is our security, our treasure, our glory, our joy. What is any station without thee!—How can its duties be discharged? its trials be endured? its comforts be sanctified! But every residence with thee is ennobled and blessed. Heaven is the only tabernacle of God with men.—Thus the two disciples, when the Lord made as if he would have gone farther, constrained him, saying, It is toward evening, and the day is far spent—and—did he refuse? He went in to tarry with them. Do we thus prize him? Do we thus pray that he would go where we go, and

dwell where we dwell? If not, we have a poor prospect before us. If we *can* live without God with us in this world, we *must* live without him in another. But if our souls cleave to Him, and cry, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me"—we may rejoice in the promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

—But let me not here overlook two things. First, The number of his people—"The many thousands of Israel." "For," unless we send out ignorance and bigotry to count them, "who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" And the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a thousandfold! Secondly, We should be concerned for the whole Israel of God. They all belong to us. They are all fellow-citizens of the same community; branches of the same household; members of the same body. They are more intimately related, and ought to be more endeared to us, than any earthly friends, or natural relations.

—Pray therefore for the peace of Jerusalem. For your brethren and companions' sakes, say, Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.—"Return, O Lord"—not unto our family, or tribe; not unto the thousands of Episcopalians or Dissenters—but "unto the many thousands of Israel." "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." And "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

APRIL 23.

"*From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.*"—Psalm lxi. 2, 3.

He does the most important service, who instructs us to pray. We may here learn much from the example of David.

—*How* would he pray? "I will *cry* unto Thee." Crying is a substitute for speech; and also the expression of earnestness. A child can cry, long before it can articulate; and its cries as much move the parent, as any eloquence of words. A person in great danger, or want, or pain, not only utters himself, but cries out, and often aloud, according to the pressure of his feelings. Let me pray as I can. I may not be able to express my desires as some do; but, if I am deeply affected by them, and they spring from a broken heart and a contrite spirit, they shall not be despised.

—*Where* would he pray? "*From the ends of the earth* will I cry unto Thee." He means any condition, however desolate or distant—distance of place being put for greatness of extremity. Sometimes we may be thrown into situations the most trying and remote from human aid. But wherever we are, God is *there* to hear and succour us. Thus Joseph found him, when sold into Egypt; and John, when he was exiled in Patmos; and Paul, when tossed far off upon the sea. We are as near the Throne of Grace in one place as another. Prayer can reach Him, wherever we are, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. "While they speak I will answer; and before they speak I will hear."

—*When* would he pray? "*When my heart is overwhelmed.*" Not that he would restrain prayer at other times: we are to pray without ceasing. It is the character of a hypocrite, that he will not always call upon God. There are birds who only make a noise at the approach of bad weather; and there are persons who only pour out a prayer when God's chastening hand is upon them. But what should we think of a neighbour or friend, who never called upon us, but when he wanted to borrow, or to beg?—Yet, what is always proper, may be sometimes peculiarly seasonable, natural, and necessary. And this is the case when we are in trouble and affliction. Therefore says God, Call upon me in the day of trouble. The answer will in due time relieve and deliver. The exercise will immediately soothe and sanctify. Is any afflicted? Let him pray.

—*For what* would he pray? "*Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.*" What means he by this Rock, but something which could afford him support, when he was ready to be swallowed up? The perfections of Jehovah; the everlasting Covenant; the doctrine of Providence; the Lord Jesus, who is our hope—This is the rest, and this is the refreshing. And yet, when the relief is provided, and when we see it too, we cannot reach it of ourselves. We need a divine agency to conduct us to it. We live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit.

—*Whence* does he derive his encouragement to pray? "For Thou *hast been* a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." Nothing can be more confirming and exciting, than the review of God's former interpositions on our behalf: and to reason from what he has been, to what he will be; and from what he has done, to what he will do. For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And they that know his Name will put their trust in him.

"His love, in time past,
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me, at last
In trouble to sink.
Each sweet Ebenezer
I have in review,
Confirms his good pleasure
To help me quite through."

APRIL 24.

"But now they are hid from thine eyes."
Luke xix. 42.

When Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart. Solomon tells us, Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil. But God's keeping silence is not approbation. His long-suffering is not even connivance. He can be merciful, without allowing us to trifle, and insult him for ever. His patience has its rules and its bounds. And Jerusalem knew this.

—Much has been said on what is termed a day of grace; and much which we neither admire or believe. We are not authorised to say any one is beyond hope, while he is yet in life. Manasseh would have seemed very likely to be such a desperate character; but *he* obtained mercy.

"And while the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

If we cannot view any of our fellow-creatures as beyond the possibility of salvation, so we have no rule by which we can absolutely determine against ourselves—Yet there are several things of fearful import, to which we do well to attend.

First. The language of the Word of God is fearful. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." "Israel would none of me; so I gave them up to their own hearts' lust." "In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." "Because I have called, and ye refused: I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." "Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation." We offer no commentary on these passages—but, surely, their language is fearful.

Secondly. We know that final impenitency is irrecoverably hopeless; and *with life* all our opportunities end—and this is fearful. It would not be kindness, but cruelty, to flatter men with a contrary expectation. Search the Scripture, and you will always find a difference between the present and the future. One is a state of trial, the other of decision. The one is sowing, the other reaping: and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Is not this sufficient to induce us to seek the Lord while he may be found; and to call upon him while he is near?

Thirdly. This life, upon which every thing depends, is very brief—this is fearful. Look at the images of Scripture: a flower of the field; a flood; a watch in the night; a dream; a vapour. Consider the deaths that come under your own observation. Observe the frailty of your frame. Remember the numberless diseases, and accidents to which you are exposed. Think of your pulse, where the question is asked sixty times every minute, whether you shall live or die—and then you may well exclaim—

"Great God! on what a slender thread
Hang everlasting things!
The eternal state of all the dead
Upon life's feeble strings!"

Fourthly. Our continuance here is as uncertain as it is short—this is fearful. "I have not had," said a good man, "a to-morrow for years." It would be well if we had not. Indeed, we have not in *reality*, whatever we may have in imagination. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

Fifthly. Before this short and uncertain period terminates, many opportunities and advantages may elapse, to return no more—this is fearful. Many convictions may die away, no more to be renewed again unto repentance. We may be deprived of reason; and religion can only operate through the medium of thought. Old age helps on insensibility; and before we are aware, though unpardoned and unrenewed, we may become incapable of a moral change. The Gospel may be removed from us. We may be placed where it is not in our power to attend it. We may become deaf, or blind. Sickness may confine us to a room of pain, or a bed of languishing. The influences necessary to render the means of grace effectual may be withholden. Though Paul plants, and Apollos waters, God alone gives the increase: and though we can do nothing to deserve his grace, we may provoke his anger; and he may judicially give us up to a reprobate mind. The heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin—and no less so—by familiarity with divine things. And is not this the case with many? Once their consciences smote them. They dropped a tear upon their Bible. When walking alone, among the works of God, they prayed, "Lord, I am thine; save me." But Felix no more trembles. And the Gadarenes have besought the healer of their neighbours, and the reprover of their sin, to depart out of their coasts.

APRIL 25.

"In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."—Mark i. 35.

And yet he had been greatly occupied the whole of the day preceding this. We think little of time; but he never passed an idle hour. The whole of his life said, I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is yet day: the night cometh wherein no man can work. He was really a man; he took our infirmities: and wearied nature required repose: but he distinguished between the necessary and the needless; and even between refreshment and indulgence; and while he enjoined self-denial upon his disciples, as the very first lesson in his school, "he pleased not himself."

It is allowed, that as to the measure of sleep, no one rule can be laid down for all. Some require more than others. But it is questionable whether they require *much* more. Yea, it may be questioned, whether they require *any* more, as to *length*. What they want more of is *better* sleep: and the quality would be improved by lessening the quantity. Let those who are now so wakeful, and restless, and can only sleep sound when they ought to be rising—let them try the expedient, and see whether a few hours of sweet and solid sleep be not preferable to the privilege of being bedridden, rather than of enjoying repose.

We should also inquire too, whether we have not produced the habit itself that *now* demands so much to satisfy it. If so, we are accountable for the cause, as well as the effect.

—We should also be always fearful and suspicious when our reasonings and pleadings are on the side of gratification and ease. It is here, where nothing sinful is thought of, and no danger appears; it is here we peculiarly need the admonition, Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

—Some live only to do evil. We do not wish *them* to rise early. They are only harmless while they sleep.

—Some live a life of mere indolence and ease. They are indeed free from vice, but they have no useful employment. It is of little importance at what time *they* rise. There is very little difference between their sleeping and wakeful hours. The one is as barren as the other of any active endeavours to glorify God, or serve their generation, or work out their own salvation.

But surely there are some who feel that life is infinitely important: who know that they are placed here to gain good and to do good: who remember that the only opportunities they have for both, are short and uncertain—Surely these will not sleep as do others

—Surely these will feel the excitement and reproach—It is high time to awake out of sleep—They that sleep, sleep in the *night*.

—In a word, has not early rising every recommendation? Is it not *physically* advantageous? Is it not better for health? Consult your strength, your appetite, your nerves, your spirits, your complexion. Ask your physician. Is there a medical man upon earth that would risk his reputation by a contrary opinion? Sinclair, in his volumes on health and longevity, remarks, that though those who lived to a very great age differed in many things, they all resembled each other here. There was not one of them but rose early.

—Is it not desirable as to our civil concerns? What an advantage has a tradesman by early rising? in planning and arranging his concerns for the day? in forwarding his work, and placing it under his command? and in having leisure for any incidental engagement, without stopping or deranging the usual course of his calling?—While another, who has said, A little more sleep, a little more slumber; and who begins at ten what he should have commenced at six; is thrown into haste and confusion; hurries on to overtake himself; finds through the day his duty a turmoil; and feels himself a drudge. If we turn from the shop and look into the family, what a difference between the early and late mistress! and the early and the late servant! Even those who do not practise early rising themselves plead for the importance of it in their domestics, and would never engage them without it. Indeed the reputation of every individual, whatever be his condition in life, is concerned in it; and his character, in the feelings of others, is unavoidably lowered by late rising, unless there be a known and justifiable cause.

—Above all, is it not *morally* important? The Heathens said, the morning was the friend to the muses. It is surely a friend to the graces. If it be the best time for study, it is also the best time for devotion. It is better to go from prayer to business than from business to prayer. Intercourse with God prepares us for our intercourse with our fellow-creatures; and for every occurrence, whether pleasing or painful. Who would go out in the morning, not knowing what a day may bring forth, and feeling his ignorance, and weakness, and depravity, and danger—without retiring first and committing himself to God? Boerhaave, the celebrated physician, rose early in the morning, and, through life, his practice was to retire an hour for private prayer and meditation. This, he often told his friends, gave him firmness and vigour for the business of the day. He commended it, therefore, from experience, as one of the best rules of life. The great Judge Hale, too, rose early, and retired for prayer, and read

a portion of God's Word; without which, he said, nothing prospered with him all the day. But see the Lord of all!!—What did *He?*

APRIL 26.

"*Sitting at the feet of Jesus.*"—Luke viii. 35.

—This was a place of nearness. Love longs to be near its attraction—and this man now loves his benefactor, and feels his obligations to his pity and power.

—It was a place of safety. He naturally dreaded the return of the malady, and the devils gaining possession of him again—he therefore keeps close to his Deliverer.

It was the place of instruction. The two former purposes might have been answered by his sitting at the side of Jesus. But sitting at his feet was the position and posture of a learner. "They sat down at his feet," says Moses, when God was on the top of Horeb, and the people at the bottom, and received of his words. Isaiah, speaking of Abraham, says, "God called him to his feet," Martha had a sister, "who also sat at Jesus' feet." Saul of Tarsus "was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel." In all these instances there is a reference to the ancient and Eastern custom—when the master occupied a higher seat, and the scholars were sitting at his feet—as hereby he had them in view, and they were reminded, by their very place, of the reverence and submission which became them, as learners.

This is the place we should all be found in. But how is it possible for us to sit at his feet now? He said, I am no more in the world: and the heavens have received him till the restitution of all things. It is true, he is no longer here, corporeally; but he is here spiritually. He is not visible, but he is accessible.

We have his Throne, and his House, and his Word, and his ministers, and his ordinances—We have himself: for he has said, Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them—*We* can, therefore, sit at his feet. And, in recommendation of this place, let us observe the excellences of the Master, and the advantages of his disciples; for the one involves the other.

And here we must not overlook the dignity of his character. A tutor seems to shed lustre over his pupils; and scholars have always prided themselves in the name of an illustrious preceptor. A young Israelitish prophet would have boasted in having been in the school of Samuel, or Elijah. How far did the Queen of Sheba come to hear the wisdom of Solomon!—But, behold, a greater than Solomon is here!—One fairer than the children of men—He is Lord of all. See that poor, despised Christian. He is debarred every seat of learning among men; but he is under a Divine instructor, and such honour have all his saints. For so highly are they related; so peculiar is their destination; so sublime are the stations they are to fill, and the functions they are to discharge, as kings and priests unto God for ever; that their education is not entrusted to a creature—All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.

There is, also, the perfection of his ability. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Other teachers may be mistaken, and they may deceive us. They cannot, therefore, deserve our implicit and absolute confidence. But he knows every thing, and every thing perfectly. We cannot, therefore, rely too much on his decisions. Heaven and earth may pass away; but His word shall not pass away.

There is the kindness of his manner. Men often discourage, and intimidate learners, by their distance, hastiness, and austerity. They have not long-suffering, and gentleness, and tenderness enough, to attract and attach the very soul of the pupil; to soften and shame him, if perverse; to fix him, if roving and volatile; to inspire him with confidence, if timid; and to produce in him at once, that freedom and application of mind, so essential to improvement, and so incompatible with agitation and confusion of spirit. For something besides talent—and may we not say something beyond talent?—is required in a teacher. In proportion to the greatness of his knowledge, and the quickness and facility of his apprehension, a master will be tried by the imperfections of his scholars; and the scholars will be the more liable to be abashed, and depressed. Conscious of their ignorance, and inability, and slowness, they will be reluctant, and afraid to give up themselves to such a superior tutor—unless he has other qualities; and such a tutor will not be very likely to waste, as he would suppose, *his* time and talents, upon such unpromising subjects. But *we* sit at the feet of One, whose condescension equals his greatness. He will stoop to teach me, even where I must *begin*. He will accommodate himself to my wants, and weakness. He will repeat his lessons. He will give me line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little—and upbraid not. Thus he taught his immediate disciples, as they were able to bear it, and loved them to the end, notwithstanding their mistakes and infirmities. And thus he said to his hearers; Learn of *me*, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Does he not refer to himself in these attributes as a motive, as well as an example? As much as to say, "You need not be afraid to place yourselves under my care—I will deal tenderly with you."

—There is also the efficiency of his tuition. None teaches like him. Other masters teach, but they cannot make their pupils

learn. They can improve, but they cannot impart ability: and without some aptitude for an art or science, little progress will be made under the best efforts. What could Handel or Haydn have done with a clown, without any taste or ear for music? But Jesus gives the capacity and the disposition he requires. He furnishes, not only the medium, but the faculty of vision. He makes the blind to see. And though, like the morning, we set off with a few rays only, our path is like that of the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

But what are the instructions he gives! What is all other knowledge compared with this? Ask Paul: he was a man of genius and learning; he did not despise science—yet he exclaims, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Of other knowledge we may be destitute, and yet safe. But this is life eternal. Other knowledge leaves us as it finds us; yea, it often injures the possessor; and talent caters for depravity. But a man at his feet feels his words to be spirit and life. He is taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. In other cases, "in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow;" but, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." The burden of guilt is removed, and they enter into rest. They cast all their care on Him, who careth for them. Their minds are kept in perfect peace. They can not only bear, but enjoy solitude. Even in the midst of trouble they are revived; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God—How sweet are his words unto their taste! yea, sweeter than honey to their mouth!

No wonder, therefore, the disciple prizes his privilege, and cannot be seduced from his Master's feet. He has been taught the truth as it is in Jesus. He knows the truth; and the truth has made him free. And, therefore, upon the question, when others are offended, "Will ye also go away?" he answers, with Peter—Where can we do so well? Lord, to whom shall we go? To sin? That hath ruined us. To the world? That has deceived us. To the Heathen philosophers? Their foolish hearts are darkened. To the Chief Priests and Pharisees? They are the blind leading the blind. To the Law? That roars, and flames despair. To Moses? He wrote of thee. To thee gave all the Prophets witness. Lord, to whom should we go, but unto thee? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life.

APRIL 27.

"*Members one of another.*"—Rom. xii. 5.

All mankind are joined together by a connexion which only death can dissolve. The remoteness of the situation in which we are placed does not hinder this connexion, but rather strengthens it. We see this in the traffic of different nations, and their mutual exchange of commodities. The inhabitants of one region cultivate the productions of the ground, and produce articles of manufacture for the use of those of another; and those of another do the same in return for them; and we sometimes find the four quarters of the globe in the furniture of one house, or the provisions of one table. The sea, which seemed likely to separate the dwellers upon earth, has, in the progress of science and arts, rendered them accessible to each other; and navigation has become the principal medium of trade.

There are various distinctions in life; and the Scripture does not discountenance them. Neither are we to view them as selfish, or terminating only in the advantage of the superior ranks. The lowest are useful, as well as the highest. The rich benefit the poor; and the poor labour for the rich. The king is the protector of his subjects; and every subject contributes to the support of the king: the king is served by the labour of the field. There is no such thing as independence; and were it not for ignorance and pride, we should never think of it. The under ranks are even the basis of the community: the lowest parts of the wall sustain the higher. The more we rise, and possess, the less claim have we to independence; as a larger building requires more support than a smaller. A nobleman employs a thousand hands; a peasant wants but two—and these are his own.

—If this reasoning be true as to men, it is more so as to Christians. And it is in this light Paul so frequently and largely speaks of it—"I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." To show how important it is to display a mutual dependence, he remarks—"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." They have all their respective places and uses. Each is necessary; necessary to each, and necessary to the whole; necessary to the beauty, the strength, the happiness the perfection of the whole—Why, then, should we set at nought a brother?

Yet the harmony is often broken and a schism found in the body. The Christian Church would never have been reduced to its present disjointed state, if the members had not been beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ. The first wrong step took them to a distance from the Spirit; and as

though Christ had been divided, and had imparted himself and his Gospel to some, exclusively of others; the names of creatures became noted as the sources from which particular doctrines were derived, and by whom particular modes of discipline were established. The words the Holy Ghost used were less regarded than the words which man's wisdom teacheth. The worthy Name by which Christians were originally called, was no longer sufficient. They ranged themselves under different leaders, and called "Rabbi;" forgetting who had forbidden this; and that one was their Master, even Christ, while all they are only brethren. Hence feuds and animosities followed; and the professors of meekness itself learned to bite and devour one another. The consequences of such measures are known and felt even at the present day: and though much of the violence of religious parties has subsided, distinctions unscriptural, and unnecessary, (in the degree, if not in the existence) are supported: and though all hold the same Head, the members of one communion often look for no more honour and assistance from those of another, than if they were not of the body.

But "if the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" "But now are they many members, yet but one body;" "that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

—Christians are not only as so many members in a natural body, but as so many members in a civil, or domestic state. However different and distant they were by nature from each other, an effectual method has been taken by Divine Grace to bring them together. They are reconciled in one body on the Cross. They are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. Therefore they are one in Christ, by obligation, as well as by connexion and dependence. Christ over his own house, has right to enact a law, for the well-ordering and governing of those placed under him. This law is clearly contained in the Scripture; and vain is every other proof of our belonging to him, unless we obey it. And what says He? "Then are ye my disciples, if ye love one another." According to this, we must not live to ourselves—Each is to live for the good of each, and of all. Even a gratification, harmless in itself, is to be avoided, if the peace of a weak conscience will thereby be destroyed. Such was the example of Paul. Such was the example of Jesus—"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

> "Now, by the bowels of my God,
> His sharp distress, his sore complaints,
> By his last groans, his dying blood,
> I charge my soul to love the saints"

APRIL 28.

"*When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father.*"—John xiii. 1.

—"His hour" means the period of his death. In another place it is called the hour of his enemies—"This," said he, "is *your* hour and the power of darkness." It is called *their* hour because they seemed to have every thing their own way. They apprehended him; and mocked him; and scourged him; and nailed him to the cross. All their purposes and wishes succeeded; and they considered his cause as annihilated. But their triumph was short and foolish. What they had done was provided for; was admitted into his plan; and the very means of accomplishing his design—

—It was "*His* hour." He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. There was nothing casual in his death. The time was appointed; and till this arrived the attempts of his adversaries were vain—"They could not lay hands on him, because his hour was not yet come." It was not only *his* hour by appointment, but by importance. No such hour had been witnessed since time had commenced. No hour of his own life would bear a comparison with it. It was infinitely unique, wonderful, and interesting in its design and effects. Now was the judgment of this world. Now was the prince of this world cast out. Now was the ceremonial law abolished. Now was the moral law magnified and made honourable. Now he was to finish transgression. Now he was to bring in everlasting righteousness. Now he was to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Now he was to get himself a name above every name.

—He *knew* that his hour was come. So perfect was his foresight of the event, that he knew not only the fact itself, but the incidents attending it. He knew the whole before there was any appearance of the thing: before his enemies had formed the design; before Judas had felt the thought of treason. And thus he evinced, not only his wisdom, but his devotedness to his work. He saw the hour was at hand, but he seeks no hiding-

place, nor attempts to escape, though he had so many means in his power. It does not affect this to say, that in another sense he was unable to have released himself, because he was bound by covenant engagement; and if he saved others, himself he could not save. For his engagement was made in the full prospect of all he was to endure; and as the tremendous suffering approached, so far was he from repenting of what he had brought upon himself, that he said, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

—But how is his passage through this dreadful scene expressed? "That he should depart out of this world unto the Father." Here let us think of his people as well as of himself. In all things he must have the pre-eminence: but they resemble him. What is here said of his death, will, in a pleasing degree, apply to their own. Their death is not, indeed, like his, mediatorial. Neither know they the hour when it will take place. But all their times are in God's hand. And the circumstances of their death, as well as of their life, fall under his arrangement. They know they have their hour; and are immortal till it arrives. They know that enemies cannot hasten it; that friends cannot retard it. They know also that it is approaching; that it cannot be far off; that it may be very near—and therefore that it requires a constant readiness.

But was *his* death a "departing out of this world?" So is theirs. He was in it for three-and-thirty years. Many of them are in it a shorter, and many a much longer period. It was a sad world to him. It knew him not, but despised and rejected him. It hated him without a cause. It persecuted him from his birth, refused him a place where to lay his head, and could not be satisfied till it had shed his blood. And *they* find it a vain and deceitful world; a vexing and injurious world; a vile and wicked world. Every thing in it cries, Arise, and depart hence: for this is not your rest, because it is polluted. And are we unwilling to go? Yes—

> "Thankless for favours from on high,
> Man thinks he fades too soon;
> Though 'tis his privilege to die,
> Would he improve the boon.
>
> "But he, not wise enough to scan
> His best concerns aright,
> Would gladly stretch life's little span
> To ages if he might—
>
> "To ages, in a world of pain—
> To ages, where he goes,
> Gall'd by affliction's heavy chain,
> And hopeless of repose.
>
> "Strange fondness of the human heart,
> Enamour'd of its harm!
> Strange world, that costs it so much smart,
> And yet has pow'r to charm!"

We do not wonder, indeed, that this should be so much the case with "men of the world." They have "their portion in this life," and no hope of a better. Bad as it is, they know that it is the best world they will ever be in; and that whatever be its troubles, to them they are only the beginnings of sorrow. But it is otherwise with Christians. They are here, like Israel in Egypt; and death is their departure for the Land of Promise. They are like strangers in an inhospitable country, and travellers at a cheerless inn; and death is their departing to their delightful home.

Was *his* death a "going to the Father?" So is theirs. That is, going to heaven; for the Father is there: and in his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. He went to the Father, to carry on their cause, and to possess his own reward; but he had been there before. Hence he said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father." Hence he speaks of heaven, without wonder. He had been at court. He had resided there, and had only left it for a season. His return, with all the glories that should follow, was the joy set before him, for which he endured the Cross. And, as love delights in the welfare of its object, he expected that his disciples would rejoice, when he said, "I go unto the Father; for the Father is greater than I." But they were never there before: all will be new, and surprising to them. Yet they, also, will have their work, and will be still praising him. They, also, will drink of the rivers of his pleasure. They will have immediate and uninterrupted access to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. And with Him is the fountain of life.

APRIL 29.

"*And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*"—Luke xxii. 43.

Thus, though the cup was not taken from him, he was heard, in that he feared, according to the promise; "I have heard thee in a time accepted; and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee." We may be heard, when we are not delivered. We may be succoured in distress, when we are not saved from it. And if the burden be not diminished, yet, if our ability to endure it be increased, the effect is the same. Paul was a proof of this. When he besought the Lord thrice, that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him, the Saviour said, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. And, says David, In the day that I cried, Thou answeredst me; and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

—Here we see the humiliation of the Saviour. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor. He was in the form of God, but took upon him the form of a servant. He

was Lord of all, but had not where to lay his head, and was relieved by the creatures of his power: "Certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, ministered unto him of their substance." He was the Lord of angels, but he was made a little lower than they—yea, he received assistance from them. "There appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him."

—What a contrast is here! His Apostles, who had been so much honoured by him, forsook him. Even Peter, James, and John, who had been admitted to the Transfiguration, and now were selected to be with him in the garden, slumbered and slept. And though, when he came to them, and found them in this condition, he pitied them, and said, The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak: yet he felt it—deeply felt it; and said, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?"—But if earth disowns him, heaven does not. If men abandon him, angels cry with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb! —"He was seen of angels." One of them announced his approaching conception; another proclaimed his birth; a multitude of them carolled his advent. In his temptation in the wilderness, "behold, angels came and ministered unto him." An angel rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and said to the women, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here:" "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." And here an angel appeared unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

He could have asked the Father, and he would have given him twelve legions of angels, and rescued him—what are we saying? *One* of these would have been sufficient—the least of them could have looked all his adversaries into nothing—But how then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? And how could he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself? Or how could he have sympathised with us, if he had never suffered? The angel, therefore, only *strengthened him.* Reminding him of the joy that was set before him: telling him of the result of his passion —the effect of it in the glory of God, and the salvation of the world: spreading before him the promises—perhaps reading to him the prophecy of Isaiah, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied"—Raising him up from the cold ground; supporting his fainting head; wiping away the bloody sweat from his dear face—so that he appeared fresh, and fair, and glorious in his visage: and made those who came to apprehend him go backward, and fall to the earth, when he only presented himself, and said, "I am he."

In all things he has the pre-eminence; and how willing are his people to acknowledge it! But while he is the first-born among many brethren, all of them are predestinated to be conformed to him. Angels, therefore, who attended him, attend them also. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that are the heirs of salvation?" Their attendance is no less real than formerly, though it is no longer visible, according to the principle of the economy under which we live, and which is, to walk by faith, and not by sight. They delight to do the will of their Lord and ours. These blessed beings have no envy, no pride. They are enemies to his enemies; but they are friends to his friends. They rejoice when a sinner repenteth: and carry the dying saint into Abraham's bosom.

APRIL 30.

"*But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*"—Mark xvi. 7.

These are the words of the angel who had descended from heaven to attend his rising Lord. They were addressed to Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome. These women had honoured the Saviour; and he honoured them. They were the first to receive the announcement of his resurrection, and the first to report it.

But observe, they were to carry the news, not to the Chief Priests and Pharisees; not to Pilate; not to Herod. It was just to leave these men in the darkness they loved. They rebelled against the light; and no evidence would have convinced those who had already seen his miracles, and believed not. But his disciples, though timid and weak, and imperfect, were sincere. They had forsaken all to follow him. Their very doubting arose from the greatness of their love; and sorrow had now filled their hearts. They would, therefore, welcome the intelligence, and be influenced by it, as his followers and witnesses.

—But why is Peter distinctively mentioned? Because he was the chief of the Apostles? So far from it, the distinction reminds us of his humiliation. He had fallen by his iniquity; and after the most solemn warnings and professions, he had denied his Master, with oaths and curses. But the look in the judgment-hall had broken his heart, and made him go out and weep bitterly. He was now on the verge of despair, and ready to say—perhaps was even now saying—Ah; he will disown me—and righteously disown me—for ever! The angel's *naming* him, therefore,

on this occasion, was as much as to say, "The Saviour has not cast thee off; he has not forgotten to be gracious. He does not break a bruised read, nor quench the smoking flax, but will send forth judgment unto victory." It also conveyed an intimation to his brethren that they were to follow his example, and endeavour to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves lest they also were tempted.

—The message, more than announcing his resurrection, added, that he would go before them into Galilee. In vain we ask how he passed thither. He had the power to appear, and disappear; and to transport himself from place to place, as he pleased, in a moment of time. But what led him down so many miles from Jerusalem? Was it to intimate his forsaking that guilty city! Woe unto you when I depart from you!—Or was it to call them off from the strife and cruelties of their enemies? It was comparatively a place of security and concealment. Or was it, that their journeying down separately, or with each other, might bring them to recollection, and recover them from their late cowardice and unbelief!—Was it to tell them to withdraw, in order to be in the way of intercourse with him? It was a despised place—would he teach them to rise above local and vulgar prejudices; and to call nothing common or unclean? It is certain that he had been much in Galilee himself: and had many followers there. And this accounts for the largeness of the assembly: for the Apostles would naturally inform his friends there of this expected interview. Hence he was now seen of above five hundred brethren at once; many of whom were living when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, though some had fallen asleep.

—His promise, that they should see him there, would prove a test of their faith and affection. If they valued the sight of him, and believed his word, they would certainly repair thither. Accordingly they did repair thither; and there was he!—Let us apply this to ourselves. There are means and ordinances which he has established. In these he has engaged to be found of those that seek him. If we rely on his truth, and desire communion with him, we shall gladly avail ourselves of them. And shall we—can we be disappointed—if we do? Has he ever said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain? He has often been better than his word; but who ever found him worse? Let us go, therefore, to his Throne, and to his House, with full and lively expectation—In all places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee; for where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them. There shall we see him, as he has said unto us.

—He is also gone before us into heaven. Let us arise, and depart hence, and seek him *there*—*There* shall we see him in all his glory, according to his promise—Where I am, there shall also my servants be. Oh! to join him there! To be for ever with the Lord!

"O glorious hour! O bless'd abode!
I shall be near, and like my God:
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul."

MAY 1.

"*And I will give her her vineyards from thence.*"—Hosea ii. 15.

—Observe the Author of these favours—*I* will do it, says God. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from him. And his people will readily acknowledge that all they enjoy is not only from his agency, but his grace.

—Observe also the richness of the supplies. —I will give her—not her corn—corn is for necessity, but grapes—grapes are for delight. Yea, it is not a vine—but a vineyard—yea, vineyards! He engages to give, as if he could not do too much for them; being concerned—not only for their safety, but for their welfare—not only for their relief, but enjoyment—and not only for their tasting his consolation, but their being filled with all joy and peace in believing.

—Observe also the strangeness of the way in which these indulgences are to be communicated. For *whence* are these supplies to come? From a *wilderness*. "I will allure her, and bring her into the *wilderness*, and speak comfortably unto her: and I will give her her vineyards from *thence*." What could be looked for in a wilderness but loneliness, and mazes, and danger, and beasts of prey, and reptiles, and sand, and briers, and thorns —Who would expect to find the vineyards of Engedi there? "He only doeth wondrous things; he is God alone." He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. He makes rivers in high places, and streams in the desert. He makes the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose—and gives us vineyards from *thence*.

The region through which his people passed in their way from Egypt to Canaan, was a wilderness. Here read the words of Jeremiah: "Who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, and of the shadow of death, through a land which no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." Moses also calls it, That terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought; where there was no water. But he gave them their vineyards from thence. Though the place yielded them nothing, they were well supplied from above. Though they had no rivers or springs, he smote the rock, and the waters gushed out, and followed them in all their journeyings.

Though they had no food, the clouds poured down manna, and they did eat angels' food. Though they had no road, they had a guide to lead them the right way, in a pillar of cloud and of fire, which shaded them by day and comforted them at night. The tabernacle of God was in the midst of them. From the mercy-seat he communed with them. He sent them Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam. He gave his good Spirit to instruct them. They had grapes from Eshcol. They had a view of the glory of all lands; and at length the possession of it—where they sang—"To Him that led his people through the Wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever!"

—Earth is a wilderness. And he gives them their vineyards from thence. It was not designed to be a wilderness. But, by one man, sin entered into the world; and it was said to the transgressor, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee"—and there are enough of these. Such it is as the Fall left it. Such it now would be, but for divine grace. How discontented and miserable are the men of the world who have nothing else! especially in their afflictions—and man is born to trouble. But to the Christian the curse is turned into a blessing. He has not only before him a land of promise, but even now—even here, he has a thousand alleviations, and succours, and even delights.

> "The men of grace have found
> Glory begun below;
> And heavenly fruits on earthly ground
> From faith and hope may grow."

And if earth *be* a wilderness—when they attend divine ordinances; and hear the joyful sound; and embrace the promises; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost—they have their vineyards from thence.

Solitude is a wilderness. And he gives them their vineyards from thence. There is not only much to be done alone, but gained alone, and enjoyed alone. There we gain much of our best knowledge, and our richest experience. There we enjoy the freedom of prayer, and the most unreserved intercourse with God. There his secret is with them that fear him; and he shows them his Covenant. They are never less alone than when alone. "Go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." David said, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Nathanael under the fig-tree found something more refreshing than the shade of its leaf; more delicious than the taste of its fruit.

Outward trouble is a wilderness. Many have been afraid to be brought into it—yet He has given them their vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Achor for a door of hope. They have been saved by their undoing; and enriched by their losses. Manasseh, in his affliction, sought and found the God of his father. And David, though he was converted before, could say, It is good for me that I have been afflicted. What proofs have all his people had that He was with them in trouble! What discoveries! what supports! what tenderness of comfort have they had there! As the sufferings of Christ have abounded in them, the consolation hath also abounded by Christ.

—The state of mind produced by conviction of sin is a wilderness. A wounded spirit who can bear? Who does not remember the surprise, the confusion of mind, the terror, the anguish, the self-despair, he once felt—and who can forget the feelings induced by a discovery of the Cross, and the joy of God's salvation! Many are afraid when they see their relations and friends trembling at God's Word, and broken in heart at his feet—But Christians hail it as a token for good. They know that he gave *them their* vineyards from thence.

The same may be said of that soul-abasement and distress the believer himself may feel from increasing views of his unworthiness, depravity, and guilt. And this may be the case after he has been for years in the way everlasting, and hoping better things of himself. The experience is truly lamentable: but will the humiliation hurt him? He giveth grace unto the humble. The rain falls upon the mountain-tops, as well as in the valley: but the valleys are fertilized; they are also covered over with corn; they shout for joy; they also sing.

—The valley of the shadow of death is the last wilderness. There is much to render it uninviting and awful; and yet, when it has been actually entered, the apprehension and the gloom have fled. This has been the case generally, even with those who were most subject to bondage by the fear of it. The place has been made glad for them. They have had not only a peaceful, but a delightful entrance into the joy of their Lord. And what vineyards does he give them from THENCE!!

MAY 2.

"*A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David.*"—Psalm xxx.

THIS he built for himself, as soon as he was established king over Judah and Israel. It was, doubtless, very different from the cottage he occupied when a shepherd. But there was no impropriety in this change. A man may alter his mode of living, with his rising condition in the world. The gradations of life are not discountenanced in the

Scriptures; and we have never seen any advantage arising from the neglect of them. Good men ought to avoid extravagance; but by being mean or parsimonious, they may cause their good to be evil spoken of.

David, as a king, was obliged to do many things from a regard to his station, rather than from personal choice. Yet godliness is to show itself in all circumstances. Therefore, when he took possession of his dwelling-house, he consecrated it to God. At entering a new house, an entertainment is often given, and dissipation and excess follow. Many are invited; but God is not of the number: yea, they say unto God, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. But every thing is to be sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Our religion is to be exemplified in little and common things. We are to sanctify the week, as well to remember the Sabbath; and to walk with a perfect heart in our own dwellings, as well as to worship in the temple of God. All we have is the Lord's; and nothing is a blessing till he blesses it. And we know not what may befall us in our new abode. Here our children may be about us; or here we may weep, because they are not. Here we may find a house of mourning, for the desire of our eyes, or the guide of our youth. Here we may enjoy health, or be made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto us. Here we may live many years, or our sun may go down at noon—Let it then be our concern that the place may be the house of God while we live, and the gate of heaven when we die.

David was a poet: and was accustomed to indulge his pious genius on any particular occurrence. Here are the lines he composed on the present occasion—"I will extol thee, O Lord; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

All we notice here is, that previously to his occupying this fine mansion, he had been suffering under a dangerous disease. Kings are as mortal as their subjects, and exposed to the same evils of life. And what would a house of cedar be to one who carried into it a body full of pain? But God had recovered him speedily; and while renewed health enabled him to enjoy the blessings of Providence, Divine Grace taught him to value life as a privilege for religious purpose; prolonging his opportunities to glorify God, and serve his generation according to His will.

Nothing is more interesting than little casual insights into the history, and, above all, the experience of good and great men And in this ode we see the workings of David's mind—before, and—under, and—after the affliction.

—*Before* the affliction: "And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong"—He has not said this in words; but his views and feelings, and actions, were all vocal with God. And do we not here see the danger of indulgence? How little can we bear without self-security, without presumption, without losing the heart of a stranger! Hence the necessity of a change, and the advantage of those trials that cry to our hearts, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest."

—*Under* the affliction: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper." Cain, in his distress, goes to building. Saul sends for music. Few turn to Him that smiteth them. But prayer is the design, the sanctification, the resource, of affliction—Is any afflicted, let him pray.

—*After* the affliction; "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." He has done it.

> "His hand has loos'd my bonds of pain,
> And bound me with his love."

Therefore I will serve him with my best powers, and for ever—

And his practice corresponded with his profession. No sooner had he taken possession of his new palace, than "the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains." And then it was that he availed himself of a pious and ardent frame of mind, to *swear* unto the Lord, and *vow* unto the mighty God of Jacob. "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." How different the disposition of the selfish Jews on their return from Babylon! "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" And what gained they? Them that honour me, says God, I will honour. "Ye looked for

much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."

MAY 3.

"*To reveal his Son in me.*"—Gal. i. 16.

To reveal is to lay open something which, though in existence before, was yet unknown. The knowledge of the Son of God is necessary for all the use we can make of him. And we may observe a four-fold revelation of him. The text only speaks of one of these: but they are all true; and they are all profitable.

There is a revelation of the Saviour *to* us. This is found in the Scripture, which therefore we often call emphatically "revelation." It discovers many things; but he is the principal subject: and we are persuaded nothing has found a place in it but has some relation to him. This revelation early began. It dawned in Paradise, and the light continued to shine more and more unto the perfect day. All the Jewish ordinances and sacrifices prefigured him. Of him, Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write: and the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy. He came personally as a preacher, and he was his own subject. He unbosomed himself to his disciples as far as they were able to bear it; and promised them a fuller manifestation. This was done when the Holy Spirit taught them all things; and brought all things to their remembrance that he had said unto them; and inspired them to communicate the information to others; that all might read and understand their knowledge in the mystery of Christ.

There is a revelation of the Saviour *in* us. This is more than the former. Many who have access to the Scriptures will perish; and all their knowledge will only prove the savour of death unto death. There is however, as to information, nothing in the internal revelation that is not in the external. It is not, therefore, a new revelation in itself; for the truths themselves are as old as the Creation; but it is new as to our perception and experience. If a man, born blind, were to receive his sight, he would not see a new sun, but it would be new to him. Even in a land of vision we may be called out of darkness into his marvellous light; because the eyes of our understanding may be opened. We heard of these things before, but now, in God's light, we see light. This illumination shows us not only their reality, but their excellency; and, with their glory, fixes, and replenishes, and sways the soul. Be not satisfied with any thing short of this. Distinguish between a Christian in name, and a Christian in deed. Do not place your religion in any thing without you. Have you the witness in yourselves? Is Christ revealed in you? Have you such a sight of him, by faith, as to see that he is fairer than the children of men? as to feel him infinitely endeared? as to count all things but loss for the excellency of his knowledge? This is what he himself means, when he said, "He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life."

There is a revelation of him *by* us. It is our destiny, our duty, our privilege, to make him known. This is done by our being the subjects of his agency; as the work displays the attributes of the author, and the streams proclaim the quality of the fountain. We should discover him by our resemblance, as his followers; and by our testimony, as his witnesses. We can speak upon other subjects—Why not upon this? Who has not opportunities to extol him among children, servants, friends, neighbours? What do seeking souls want, but to see Jesus? Or doubting ones, but to be assured of his love? Have we been freely healed by him? Let us tell the diseased and dying of the Physician. Let us zealously aid every institution that aims to show forth his praise. Pray that his glory may be revealed, and that all flesh may see the salvation of our God.

There is also a revelation of him *with* us. The world knoweth us not: it knew him not. We are now hid; and he is hid; and both are to be displayed at the same time. The day of the manifestation of the sons of God is also the revelation of Jesus Christ. And when he, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. They suffered with him, and they shall be glorified together.

We wish to be distinguished. We want something exclusive: half the relish and value is gone, if others share with us. But *his* benevolence, *his* condescension, are such that he cannot be satisfied unless we partake with him: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—But where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?

MAY 4.

"*For even Christ pleased not himself.*"
Rom. xv. 3.

—Not as if his undertaking our cause was against his will; or that he ever felt it to be a task, and a grievance. He was voluntary in the engagement, and cheerful in the ex

ecution; and could say, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!—But he never followed the indulgence of his natural inclination in the days of his flesh. He preferred the glory of God and our benefit to his own gratification. He did not consult his ease; but denied the demands of sleep when duty required exertion. He rejected, with anger, Peter's proposal to spare himself from suffering. He did not consult ambitious feeling; but refused the people, when they would have made him a king. He stood not upon rank and consequence; but washed the disciples' feet, and was among them as one that serveth. He was far more delighted with Mary's reception of his word than with Martha's preparation for his appetite. He was not only thirsty, but hungry, when the disciples left him at the well to go and buy meat; but when they returned, and said, Master, eat; he replied, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of—In your absence I have had something above corporeal satisfaction—I have been saving a soul from death, and hiding a multitude of sins—My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." When the collectors of the Temple-tax came to Peter, he said to him, "What thinkest thou, Simon! of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers! Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free—The Temple is the house of my Heavenly Father, and I am his only begotten Son." But, though not bound like others, he foregoes his right, in order to avoid offence: "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend;" that is, excite pain, or dislike, or reflection, by their thinking we have not a proper regard to the Sanctuary and ordinances of God—"lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee." This he exemplified all through life: He was, therefore, well prepared, and authorized to say, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

—And observe the use the Apostle makes of it—Because Christ pleased not himself, therefore "let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please themselves"—"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." He, indeed, limits the duty. We are not to humour our brethren in a sinful course; but only in things innocent and lawful—and we are to do this, with a view to secure and promote his welfare, and not for any advantage of our own. But we are not to consult our own little conveniences, and appetites, and wishes. We are not even to follow our convictions in every disputed matter. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Here, again, the Apostle calls in Jesus, as a motive, and an example—He denied himself so as to die for this weak brother, and will you, says he, refuse to deny yourselves in a trifling forbearance on his behalf!" "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

Herein, too, Paul enjoins no more than he practised; for he drank deep into the Saviour's spirit—"I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." And how noble does he here look! And how below his principles does a Christian act, when he thinks of himself only; his own accommodation—yea, even his own conscience. He is to regard the satisfaction of another's mind, as well as his own; and is to walk, not only righteously, but charitably. Yet some say, "*I* do not *think* it sinful; therefore I am not obliged to abstain"—And was Paul obliged to abstain? All things were pure to him; but he would not eat with offence. Some seem never to regard how their conduct will affect others: but the Scripture says, "Give none offence; neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." Asaph was checked in his improper language by remembering, that if he so spake, he should "offend against the generation of the upright." Let us, therefore, beware of throwing stumblingblocks in the way of the blind. Let us make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way: but let it rather be healed.

Christianity is designed to refine and soften; to take away the heart of stone, and to give us hearts of flesh: to polish off the rudenesses and arroganees of our manners and tempers; and to make us blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke. Lord Chatham, in one of his Letters to his Nephew, finely says, "Politeness is benevolence in little things." Religion should make us the most polite creatures in the world: and what persons of rank do from education, we should do from principle! yielding our own desires and claims, to become all things to all men, if by any means we may gain some; and be not only sincere, but without offence, until the day of Christ.

If so, some professors of religion have much to learn. They think of nothing but their own indulgence. They know nothing of bearing with infirmity; of waiting for improvement; of watching for opportunity. They are decisive, and dictatorial, and hasty, and severe. They pride themselves only on what they call faithfulness, and which is the easiest thing in religion to them, because it falls in with their own natural temper—not to say, that frequently what they mean by fidelity is only rudeness and insolence. But while we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth, we are required to be courteous; and to pursue whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report.

And without this, professors will not only render religion unamiable and repulsive; but will lower themselves in general estimation, and lose the influence which is derivable from reputation and esteem. Who can regard the haughty, and the selfish? But for a good man some would even dare to die. An inoffensive, self-denying, lovely disposition and carriage wins the heart. It is not in our power to love: but it is in our power to be loved. Our loving another depends upon him; and here we have no control: but another's loving us, depends upon ourselves; and he that will have friends, must show himself friendly.

Doddridge buried a most interesting child at nine years of age. The dear little creature was a general favourite: and he tells us in his Funeral Sermon, that when he one day asked her, how it was that every body loved her—I know not, she said, unless it be that I love every body. Tell your children this. Also read to them—"The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men."

"For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us, therefore, follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."

MAY 5.

"*If thou knewest the gift of God.*"
John iv. 10.

As if he had said to the woman—Thou mistakest me for a mere Jew, wandering, and weary, and sitting thus on the well, and asking for the refreshment of water, seemingly dependent on the kindness of a stranger. But if thou wert acquainted with me—that I am the Mercy promised from the beginning; the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; that I am come into the world to save sinners; and that in me all fulness dwells—what an opportunity wouldst thou find is now afforded thee—"if thou knewest the gift of God"—

He calls himself the *gift of God*, because he came not according to the course of nature. A body was prepared him. A virgin conceives, and bears a Son; and the holy thing born of her is called, The Son of God. —We go also further. A preternatural interposition might have taken place in a way of wrath; and this is what seemed most probable in the case, and would have been the foreboding of our guilty minds. But God sent not his only begotten Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He therefore came, not according to any rule of desert. A few years ago, we heard much of the rights of man; and though the expression was abused, and brought into contempt, there is a propriety in it. Man has rights, with regard to his fellow-creatures. Children have rights, with regard to parents; and subjects, with regard to sovereigns. A man has a right to enjoy the fruit of his labour; he has a right to worship the Supreme Being according to his conscience. But what were his rights with regard to God? What right to protection has a subject that has become rebellious? What right to wages has a servant that has run away from his master? As sinners, we had forfeited all expectation from God—except a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation. We could have no right to the bread we eat, or the air we breathe. What claim, then, had we upon God for the Son of his love? He was a gift infinitely free; and not only free as opposed to desert, but also as opposed to desire. Was he withholden till we felt our need of him, and became suppliants at our offended Maker's feet? Ages before we were born, the plan was formed, and accomplished, and announced. And when we are desirous of obtaining the blessings of it, we find them provided; and hear a voice, saying, Come, for all things are now ready. All other good, too, is insured by him. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Yea, he has given us all things in him; and whatever a perishing sinner needs, even to life eternal, is to be derived from him.

—And if you *knew* the gift of God—surely you would say, with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." You should overlook nothing in his bounty; but gratitude should bear some proportion to the favour it acknowledges. What is the sun in Nature, to this Sun of Righteousness! What is our daily bread, to this Sun of Righteousness! What is our daily bread, to this Bread of Life! Here are the exceeding riches of his grace—in his kindness towards us by Christ Jesus.

—If you knew the gift of God, surely you would avail yourselves of it. You would consider a participation of him as the one thing

needful. You would receive him as he is presented in the Gospel; and as Zaccheus received him, who made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

—If you knew the gift of God, you would not yield to despondency. You would not say, by way of objection, I have no money, no worthiness. This is supposed. Who thinks of buying a gift? of deserving a gift? especially such a gift!

—If you knew the gift of God, you would make him known. You would commend him to your children, your relations, your friends, your neighbours—You would pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory"—

"His worth if all the nations knew,
Sure the whole earth would love him too."

MAY 6.

"*Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.*"—2 Sam. vii. 27.

WHERE did he find his inclination and power to pray! "In his heart." The heart is every thing in religion. Man judgeth according to the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh to the heart; and requires it—My son, give me thy heart. Where he does not find this, *He* finds nothing. Where *this* speaks, words are needless: he knows what is the mind of the spirit. Hannah—she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard—yet what a prayer she prayed! and how successfully! It is a blessed thing, therefore, to find it in our heart to pray, —so that, while it is with many a bodily exercise only; a task which they would gladly decline; an effort forced upon them from something without, from some danger, or trouble: we may do it naturally: and therefore constantly and pleasantly, from a principle in us—like a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.

And what was the prayer he found there? It was *this*—"Let the house of thy servant David be established before thee." David had a peculiar concern for his family; and, from his character, we may be assured, he wished it to be not only or principally glorious, but good. It is a man's duty to seek to promote the temporal welfare of his house: for he that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. But the wish of many is not to build up their house in Israel, but in the world. They are only anxious for an increase of earthly wealth and honour. And how injurious have such risings in life proved to the comfort and the religion of the family. And how inconsiderate and inconsistent are parents, especially if they are pious ones, in longing for such perils, when they know the depravity of human nature, and the snares of prosperity. How much better is it to see, and to leave their household great in the sight of the Lord; and under the blessing of that Providence which will make all things work together for their good.

And what produced *this* prayer? "*Therefore*"—"For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house:" "*therefore* hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." He had refused him the pleasure and honour of building the Temple which he had purposed. But he should be no loser. The will should be taken for the deed. Though he did not build God a house, God would build him a house—and except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it. But all things are possible with him: and them that honour him, he will honour. What the king said to his prime minister—"You mind my affairs, and I will mind yours"—he says to each of his servants: Serve me yourselves; and be persuaded that my blessing is upon my people, and that the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

—But see—the certainty of a thing does not supersede the use of the means in attaining it. Why should David pray for it, when God had pledged himself to do it? So some would argue: but it would be the arguing of folly. The Scripture, the wisdom of God, knows nothing of this perversion. No doctrine there leads to enthusiasm. There the means and the end are connected. There activity grows out of dependence; and zeal, out of confidence. There God says, after he has promised the thing, "I will yet be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them." Yea, we see prayer is not only consistent with the promise, but derived from it. It is this that furnishes the matter of our petitions, and gives us all our encouragements.

Therefore let us be thankful for the promises. Let us search them out. Let us place them opposite all our wants. Let us plead them, and say, Remember the Word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused him to hope. And, as *then* we can ask in faith, so we may pray with confidence: for whatsoever we ask according to his will, we know he heareth us.

MAY 7.

"*The Sun of Righteousness shall arise.*" Mal. iv. 2.

HE is called the Sun of Righteousness, to intimate that he is the same in the righteous world as the orb of day is in the natural. The importance of the latter is acknowledged by all; but the value of the former is infinitely greater. What are the interests of time and sense, to those of the soul and eternity!

We know there is only one sun in our system: and there is one Mediator between

God and man. Neither is there salvation in any other—I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. The vastness of the sun is surprising: but Jesus is the Lord of all. His greatness is unsearchable. The beauty and glory of the sun are such, that, in the absence of Revelation, and when creatures were idols, we can scarcely wonder that this illustrious display of Deity should have been adored. But He is fairer than the children of men—Yea, he is altogether lovely; and all the angels of God are commanded to worship him. But consider the inestimable usefulness of this luminary! How he enlightens! warms! fructifies! adorns! blesses! What changes does he produce! How he fills the air with songs, and the gardens with fruit and fragrance! How he clothes the woods with foliage, and the meadows with grass! How he fills the valleys with corn, and makes the little hills rejoice on every side: and crowns the year with his goodness!—And this he has always done. The sun that ripened Isaac's corn, ripens ours; and, though he has shone for so many ages, he is undiminished, and is as all-sufficient as ever. What an image of Him, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever! who has always been the source of light, life, relief, and comfort! the hope, the consolation of Israel! the desire of all nations! Truly light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. But he that seeth the Sun of Righteousness, and believeth on Jesus, hath everlasting life.

—The *rising* of the sun is the finest spectacle in the creation. I fear some never saw it; at least at the most interesting season of the year. What, to them, are a thousand rising suns, to the sublimity of lying late in bed! But when and how does this Sun of Righteousness arise? His coming was announced immediately after the Fall, when God said, the seed of the woman should bruise the Serpent's head. This was the very first beam of the early dawn of that light which was to shine more and more unto the perfect day. His approach obscurely appeared in the types and services of the Ceremonial Law. In the clearer discoveries of the prophets, the morning was beginning to spread upon the mountains. But to the Jews he was below the horizon: they longed to see his day; and kings and righteous men pressed forward to the brightness of his rising. At length, he actually arose; and when the fulness of time was come—God sent forth his Son. A messenger from heaven proclaimed him to the shepherds, and said, I bring you glad tidings of great joy. The Saviour is born! Oh the splendour of that morning! —It brought glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men—GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

—He rises in the dispensation of the Gospel. Whenever this enters a nation or a village, *He* is evidently set forth, and the savour of his knowledge diffused. It is then said to the place, and to the people, Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

—He rises in spiritual illumination. Then he is revealed in us. He is presented to the eye of the soul. He is seen in a new manner. He fixes and fills the mind; he governs the life.

—He rises in renewed manifestations. For sometimes he hides his face, and we are troubled. Then we anxiously ask, O when wilt Thou come unto me? Then we wait for him more than they that watch for the morning—and when we behold him again, find a brighter day.

—He rises in ordinances. What fresh and enlivening views of him have we often in meditation; in prayer; in his own Supper; in reading and hearing his word!

> —"Sometimes a light surprises
> The Christian, while he sings;
> It is the Lord that rises
> With healing in his wings."

But how will he arise in the irradiations of heaven—in the morning of immortality; making a day, to be sullied with no cloud, to be followed with no evening shade! Then their sun shall no more go down—

> "God shall rise, and, shining o'er you,
> Turn to day the gloomy night;
> He, your God, shall be your glory,
> And your everlasting light."

MAY 8.

"*I will look for him.*"—Isaiah viii. 17.

THIS is peculiar language. It is the language of none in *heaven*. There all have found him, and are for ever with the Lord. It is the language of none in *hell*. There they are only concerned to escape from his hand, and to elude his eye. It is not the language of any in the WORLD. There they are sufficiently active and eager; but they rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrow, to gain some temporal advantage, honour, or pleasure—but none saith, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" It is not the language of all in the CHURCH. There are some happy souls who know the joyful sound, and walk in the light of God's countenance: in his Name they rejoice all the day, and in his righteousness they are exalted. But there are others, whose desire is to his Name, and to the remembrance of him; whose wish is, "Oh that I were as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon my head, and the Almighty was yet with me." These—these are the persons who are saying—and they cannot do better than to say—"I will look for him."

It is here supposed that God may hide him

self from his people. Indeed it is expressly asserted in the former part of the verse, "I will wait upon the Lord, who hideth himself from the house of Jacob." Sometimes he does this as to providential dispensations, suffering them to fall into trouble, and for awhile leaving them, as if he had no regard for them, and had forgotten to be gracious. But we now refer to spiritual manifestations. Sometimes they are so in the dark, that they are unable to perceive their condition, or to enjoy the comforts of the Holy Ghost. God loves them always, and they cannot serve him, in vain; but they cannot always see this, as they once did. The sun is as really in his course, in a dark day, as in a bright one, but his face is hid by fogs and clouds: and, David says to his God, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." For when we are in the dark with regard to *him*, other things come forth and dismay us—and it is true, morally, as well as physically, "Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth."

But the subjects of divine grace cannot rest satisfied without God. We see this in Job: "Oh that I knew where I might find him! Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." This anxiety and restlessness to find him results from three things. Love—that longs to be near the object of attachment, and cannot endure separation. Conviction—which tells him of God's infinite importance to his case, and of his own entire dependence upon him. I am sick, says he, and he is my only physician; I am a traveller, and he is my only guide. I have nothing; he possesses all things. Experience—he has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and the relish of the enjoyment adds to the sense of want; for that which indulges the appetite, provokes it also. Hence, though the believer does not desire more *than* God, he desires more *of* him.

Well—this restlessness is a token for good. Henry says, "A Christian is always on the perch, or on the wing: he is always reposing in God, or in flight after him; and the latter is as good an evidence of religion as the former—for delight is not only a part of complacency and affection, but also fear, complaint, desire—fear of losing the object—complaint of our enjoying so little of it—desire of attaining and feeling more."

Therefore be of good comfort—and if you ask, Where you are to look for him: Look for him in Christ, where he is reconciling the world to himself. In him he is well pleased. Look for him in the promises: there you will find him, pledged in every readiness of power and compassion. Look for him in his ordinances: where two or three are gathered together, there is He in the midst of them. And not only look for him in the temple, but in the closet: pray to thy Father who *is* in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. Look for him in thy former experiences. Call to remembrance thy song in the night. Can all your former views and feelings be a delusion? Would he have shown you such things as these, and also have accepted an offering at your hands, if he had been minded to kill you?

And when you have found him whom you are looking for, fall at his feet, and ingenuously confess your unworthiness in causing him to withdraw from you. Do not complain of *him;* justify *him;* but condemn *yourselves.* And instead of thinking he has dealt hardly with you, wonder that he has not cast you off for ever, and be thankful that he has been found of you again. Again you have morning; again you have spring: but the rising and shining of the sun has made it. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." Cleave to him with purpose of heart. Resolve rather to die than again grieve his Holy Spirit. And not only watch, but pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

MAY 9.

"So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."—Dan. vi. 23.

His case at first seemed very hard to flesh and blood. But here we see the end of the Lord. All was so over-ruled, that Daniel had no reason to repent of his conduct, or to lament the result of it. It is true, the God he served continually did not preserve him from the den of lions; but he delivered him out of it. He could have made a way for his escape; but the prevention of the trial would not have been half so impressive and useful as the issue. What a night did he pass there! What hours were they of prayer and praise! of peace and joy! What reflections did he make upon the power and goodness of his God—while the hungry lions, and they had been prepared to devour, looked on, and snuffed his flesh, but felt an invisible Restrainer, who said, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophet no harm. How would he resolve to confide in him, and confess him, and serve him, in future! How would the multitude be impressed! Those who doubted would be convinced. The timid would be emboldened. Many proselytes would be made to the religion of Daniel—while the king said, "I make a decree, That in every domi-

nion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

How much, therefore, did his steadfastness conduce to the glory of God, and the advancement of his cause! Christians never honour God more than in the fires. When they suffer like themselves; when they are witnesses for God; when they show that his service is too dear to be forsaken, and that they are willing to follow him to prison, or to death; and that the religion they more than *profess*, enables them to glory in tribulation also,—then, men see that there is a reality in it—a vital—a blessed reality; and that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

But the result equally terminated in Daniel's own honour and welfare. When taken up, how would every eye be drawn towards him! How breathless would be their gaze! How would every tongue extol him! With what shoutings would they follow him home!—When they met him, how ready would every man be to say, There is the man who would rather enter a den of hungry lions, than violate his conscience, or sin against his God! What influence would be attached to his character! what weight to his advice and counsel!—A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. His reputation is perfected. His attainder is revoked. He is restored. He is promoted by his sovereign to a higher station.

—And who would not have done what Darius did! He who had been faithful to his God was more likely to be faithful to his king. This is, indeed, one of the ways in which godliness *naturally* conduces to a man's present advantage. It gains him confidence: and this is the lever of elevation. Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great, while as yet this prince was a heathen, wished to know the *character* of those about him. He, therefore, called together before him all the chiefs in his suit, and ordered them to offer sacrifices to his gods, on pain of being deprived of all their honours and functions. The trial was severe. Many sunk under it. They could not give up every thing that was dear und valuable. But some were inflexible. They had bought the truth, and they would not sell it for any price. Whatever they suffered, they were resolved to have a conscience void of offence. What happened? Those who basely complied, he drove from his presence; while those who nobly refused, he entrusted with the care of his person, and placed them in the most important offices—saying, On these men I can depend—I prize them more than all my treasures. And we know who hath said, Them that honour me I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

MAY 10.

"*And the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.*" Exod. xiii. 18, 19.

Here are two circumstances not to be overlooked, because God has deemed them worthy of record.

The first is not easily understood from the present version. It is said, They went up out of Egypt *harnessed*. The word harness, when the Bible was translated, signified not the furniture of a horse, but of a soldier—or armour; and this is the first sense the term bears in the dictionary: and, to check the presumption of a warrior, it was once said, "Let not him that putteth on the *harness* boast himself like him that putteth it off." The translators therefore meant to say, that they went out *armed*. Yet this is not at all probable. Such a jealous tyrant as Pharaoh would, by his spies, have prevented the Israelites from manufacturing, or purchasing, or hoarding up, weapons. We find in after-times, when the Philistines held the Jews in subjection, they would not allow a smith to live in the country, and only permitted them to sharpen their agricultural implements at particular places. "But they had arms in the Wilderness, when they fought Amalek and others." Yes, they had carried away a few weapons concealed, and made others out of the materials they had with them; and above all, they furnished themselves from the spoils of Pharaoh's army thrown on shore—But they were now only going out from Egypt. The margin is, they marched "*five* in a rank"—But this would have extended the train to an immense length. Others, therefore, have rendered it, "in five squadrons." But all the meaning seems to be—that they moved out—not armed—but in soldier-like order; as regularly organized and slowly as disciplined troops—and not like a rude rabble, or a huddled jostling multitude. It shows that they did not go out by "haste or by flight." And this is very remarkable, considering their numbers, and the quality of the people, and how natural it was for those behind to dread lest their task-masters should overtake them, and therefore to press forward and incommode those that were before. But there was nothing of this: they moved with such steadiness and stillness, that "against none of them did a dog move his tongue." We are also in-

formed that "there was not found one feeble among them." Indeed, they had enough to do to take care of themselves and their goods, without being encumbered with invalids. Yet did ever such an immense multitude leave a place before without one individual unable to follow? It was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

The other circumstance in this march regards "the bones of Joseph, which Moses took with them" This rendered it a kind of funeral procession, and such as no other history relates. Much people of Nain followed the bier of the widow's son; but Joseph's corpse was accompanied with every man, woman, and child, of a whole nation. There is generally some time between death and interment, though in warm climates this is very short: here was an interval of near two hundred years. Other bodies may have been carried as far, but were never so long in their conveyance to the grave—for here forty years were taken up in bearing Joseph to his burial.

We read at the death of Joseph, that "they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt;" and when we consider that he was the prime minister and the saviour of the country, and the most popular man in the realm, we may be assured that this was done in a manner the most perfect and sumptuous. The descendants of his own family would be likely to have the care of this precious deposit; and they would feel a peculiar veneration for it—But it was dear to all; and useful to all. It was a memento of the vanity of all human greatness. Joseph had risen in life to an unexampled degree of eminence. But what? where? now is the Governor and idol of Egypt? Mummied within those few inches of board! It was also a moral, as well as a mortal memento. Joseph was a very pious character: he had been highly exemplary in every relation and condition of life; and much of God, of providence, and of grace, was to be read in his history—What an advantage to be always reminded of such a man, in having his remains always in the midst of them! But the body would be, above all, valuable, as a pledge of their future destination. It was a present palpable sign of God's Covenant with their fathers, on their behalf.

For observe how they came in possession of this treasure.

It was according to the dying wish and prophecy of Joseph: "For he had straitly charged the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." His charge did not arise from a superstitious principle, as if it were better or safer to moulder in one place than another. Nor even from a principle of natural and relative affection—This feeling, indeed, is often strong, and the wish of persons to lie with their kindred seems to grow with the decline of life. How affectionately does Jacob express this sentiment, when dying! "I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah." This, however, was more than the language of Nature in the father—and so it was in the son. The Apostle tells us, "By *faith* Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." If he did it by faith, his faith must have had a divine warrant. This was the promise of a God that cannot lie, that he would give Canaan for a possession to the seed of Abraham.

"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance." And this was, at the very time, ratified by a solemn covenant. Joseph knew of this engagement, and believed it; and though the time was remote, and the difficulties in the accomplishment many, like a true son of Abraham, he staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. This raised him above the treasures of Egypt; this kept him from naturalizing there amidst all his prosperity—*there* he was only a stranger and a sojourner—another nation was his people—another land was his home. And therefore, instead of being entombed in an Egyptian pyramid, he ordered his body to be taken immediately to Goshen, and kept by them till they should go as a body to possess their inheritance, and then bury him with his fathers.

And behold the fulfilment! Enslaved as they were, they are delivered. Their enemies perish. They live by miracle for forty years in the Wilderness. The Jordan is crossed. Canaan is taken—and, says the Conqueror to the people he had led to victory, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem." What more? "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel

of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph." Here we leave his hallowed remains till the resurrection of the just; inscribing over his sepulchre—A MEMORIAL OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.

MAY 11.

"*The lame man which was healed held Peter and John.*"—Acts iii. 11.

How perfectly natural and picturesque are the narratives of the Bible. They serve at once to vouch for the truth of their statements, and to leave their representations fixed in the memory.

The circumstance here mentioned is too simple, striking, and touching, to be overlooked. The poor man had been lame from his mother's womb, and was placed daily at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, to ask alms of the worshippers. Silver and gold Peter and John had none. But they gave him something far better. In the name of the Lord Jesus, said they, rise up, and walk. And immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he, leaping up—stood—and walked—and entered with them into the temple—walking—and leaping—and praising God. The people, also, seeing what was done, hastened to Solomon's porch, greatly wondering. But the man that was healed—*held Peter and John.*

Was this the effect of apprehension? Did he imagine their influence was confined to their bodily presence? and that if he let them go his lameness would return?

Or did it result from a wish to point them out to the multitude? "Are you looking after the wonderful men who have made me whole"—"Here," says he, eager and proud to proclaim them; "Here they are—These are they."

Was it not still more the expression of his attachment? "O my deliverers and benefactors, let me attend upon you. Let me enjoy the happiness to serve you. Entreat me not to leave you, nor to return from following after you. Let me live, let me die with you."

—So it is in our spiritual cures. It is natural to feel a regard for those who have been the means of our recovery; and to keep hold of them. But let us remember, we may hold them too closely. And we do so, if we suffer them to draw us away from the God of all grace. For whoever are the instruments of doing us good, He is the agent; and he will have us to remember, that the excellency of the power is of him, and not of them. Hence the reproof—"For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." They are something in the order of means, and a proper respect is due to them in *this* character: but they are nothing as to efficiency; success is entirely from God; and his glory will he not give to another. To idolize a minister is the way to have him removed from us, or rendered unprofitable to us—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." We can never honour God so much as by dependence upon him. And them that honour him he will honour; and they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed.

MAY 12.

"*And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*"—Luke ix. 52—56.

WHY did our Saviour send a message to "make ready for him?" It could not be from a principle of self-indulgence—he had blamed Martha for her too much serving when she entertained him. Neither was it for the purpose of show and ostentation. But it was from a motive of civility—not wishing to put them to trouble and confusion by his sudden arrival, especially as he travelled not alone, but with his disciples, and probably others; and also, as he purposed paying for the accommodation he ordered—it was to *try* their dispositions. Accordingly they were immediately discovered.

But why "would they not receive him?" There had always been an implacable aversion between them and the Jews. It appeared on all occasions, and even hindered, as we find in the answer of the woman at the well, the common offices of civil life. But to this ordinary dislike, something peculiar was here added. They knew that our Lord was a public teacher, and had heard of his miracles; but his services had been with their enemies. They also had *their* temple and their festivals, which were held at the same time with those of the Jews: and one of these was at hand. But they saw he was bound, not to

mount Gerizim, but to mount Zion—Therefore "they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to *Jerusalem*."

Not far from this very place Elijah had punished Azariah's captains and companies, sent to take him. John and James therefore ask, "Lord, wilt thou that *we* command fire to come down from heaven to consume them, even as *Elias* did?" The very infirmities of good men are peculiar; they are the spots of God's children. Here was something excusable; yea, even commendable. Such was their acquaintance with Scripture—their applying to our Lord for his permission and approbation—their faith and confidence in his power, that if *He* willed the thing, it must take place—and their attachment to him: for they could not bear to see one so dear to them insulted, in being refused the common rights of strangers. But evil blended with the good. Their zeal was not according to knowledge. The punishment was also extreme: for though the people had shown their rudeness and prejudices, they had not offered them violence; yet they must be *destroyed* and sent down quick into hell in their sins—and *all* of them —though some might have been far less blameable than others. The cases, too, were not parallel. Elias had a call—the very impulse in him was supernatural, and was justified by the event: for fire from heaven would not have obeyed the dictate of private passion. He acted from a regard to the glory of God, and the welfare of Israel—But these men had no call, and were urged on by their own feelings—

He therefore rebukes them—"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." They little suspected how much their own tempers had to do in the proposal. When the Gadarenes besought him to depart out of their coasts; and when the Nazarenes took him to the brow of the hill to cast him down; these disciples did not call for such vengeance then—No: *they* were Jews—but these offenders are *Samaritans*. How insensibly does something of our selfish and carnal feelings creep in and assume a religious pretension! None of our passions justify themselves so much as anger; we think we do well to be angry—but the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. We may offer strange fire on God's own altar; but it is not thereby sanctified. The Author of Peace and Lover of Concord requires us to "show out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

How much does it become us to study our own spirits, and watch over the springs of our actions! A Jehu may say, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord," when he was only removing God's enemies to clear his own way to the throne. What do some mean by dealing faithfully, as they call it, with others, but indulging their dislike and insolence? Some professors of religion never reprove their servants and children, but in fretfulness and ill humour; and then their temper is discharged in a kind of spiritual scolding. Who can understand his errors? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Our Lord knew James and John better than they knew themselves; and, in further reproof, he refers to himself as their example: "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He came indeed to seek and to save the soul principally; but he did not overlook the body. He healed the disease. He fed the hungry. And he has taught us to be merciful to the temporal wants of our fellow-creatures. And even in carrying on his own peculiar cause, and endeavouring to promote the religion of the Bible, he allows us not to employ force; or to impoverish, or imprison, or in any way persecute. The weapons of his warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. My kingdom, said he, is not of this world: else would my servants fight—Indeed they would. Yea, they have fought. Men—women—children have fought. They have fought with more than the courage of heroes. They have *prayed;* and *lived;* and *taught;* and *wept;* and *bled;* and *died!*

MAY 13.

"*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"
Rom. vii. 25.

The experience of the Christian while in this world is of a mixed nature. It resembles the day spoken of by Zechariah; which was neither dark nor clear. Whatever advantages he attains at present, there is always enough to tell him that this is not his rest. Yet, under all his complaints, he has reason to take courage, and be thankful. So it was with Paul. For these words are to be taken in connexion with his language in the preceding verse; where he groans, being burdened with the remains of indwelling sin; "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

—Yes; even in the midst of such an experience as this, there is a fourfold ground of thankfulness. The Christian may say—First, I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that my corruption is my complaint. Once it was not so with me—neither is it so with many now. *They* drink in iniquity as the ox drinketh in water. It is their element:

but it is not mine. They roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue; but I have been made to know that it is an evil thing and bitter. I loathe it, and abhor myself for it, repenting in dust and ashes. The heart of stone has been taken away, and I have a heart of flesh; a heart affected not only with the guilt, but the pollution and the vileness of sin. I have nothing to boast of: every view I take of myself is humbling—but my desire is before him, and my groaning is not hid from him. And the weary and heavy laden are invited to come to the Saviour for rest.

Secondly, I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that though I am in the conflict, I am not conquered. Though yet alive, the enemy is dethroned. Though it rages, it does not reign. It threatens to resume its ascendency, and has sometimes alarmed my fears—I have said, I shall one day perish; but having obtained help of God, I continue to this day: faint, yet pursuing—and feeling no disposition to turn back.

Thirdly, I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that deliverance is sure.

"What though my inbred lusts rebel;
'Tis but a struggling gasp for life:
The weapons of victorious grace
Shall slay my sins, and end the strife."

The victory in this case may be inferred from the reality of the conflict. It is as certain as the word of God can render it. The result is left to no precariousness, but secured in the everlasting Covenant. He who made his soul a sacrifice for sin, shall see his seed, and be glorified in them. Their help is laid on one that is mighty. His blood cleanseth from all sin. His righteousness justifies the ungodly. His grace is sufficient for the most weak and exposed—They shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. And they may anticipate the consequence; and rejoicing in a hope that maketh not ashamed, say, I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. Yea,

Finally, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that the deliverance is near. Were it remote, I ought to wait for it with patience. Others wait. The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience until he receive the early and the latter rain. But it will not tarry. If life be short, the conflict cannot be long. Soon the warfare must be accomplished. Soon the enemies I have seen to-day, I shall see no more for ever. My salvation is nearer than when I believed. The night is far spent. The day is at hand—

"Though painful at present,
'Twill cease before long;
And then, O how pleasant
The Conqueror's song!"

MAY 14.

"*I will cause you to pass under the rod.*"
Ezek. xx. 37.

THREE things in the Scripture go by this name. A father's scourge; a king's sceptre; and a shepherd's crook. All these will apply in the present instance; and all of them are necessary to do some justice to the subject.

—There is a paternal rod. Thus we read, He that spareth the rod, hateth his son. I will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. There can be no mistake here. The idea is correction; and the rod means the instrument with which the father chastises. God is a father; and he has a rod. This rod is made up of any kind of affliction—outward troubles—bodily pains—family bereavements. Even men, wicked men, reproaching and injuring us, and undeservedly too, as to *them*, may be God's scourge to make us suffer. Thus he said of the Assyrian; "O Assyrian; the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." Our friends, our children, our dearest comforts in life, if needs be, God can make the means of chastising us. Who comes not under this rod? "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." They are not all exercised in the same way: but "what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" And who, painful as the exercise may be, cannot acknowledge in the review, if not in the enduring, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted!"

And as they are useful in our progress in the divine life, so they have frequently been the means of first awakening the desire, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" The failure of the human arm has led to a dependence on the Divine. The desolations of earth have said to purpose, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." What sent the Prodigal home? He began to be in want. What brought Manasseh to repentance? In his affliction he sought the Lord God of his father.

"Father, I bless thy gentle hand:
How kind was thy chastising rod,
That forced my conscience to a stand,
And brought my wandering soul to God!"

—There is a regal rod. So we call a sceptre. Of the Messiah, the King on his holy hill of Zion, it is said, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron:" but this refers to his adversaries. He has another kind of rod for his subjects: the Lord shall send the rod of his strength out of Zion. And what *was* sent out of Zion but the Gospel? The Gospel, therefore, is his rod: and this rod is his

sceptre; the emblem of his authority, displaying his majesty, and maintaining his rule. Hence it is added, "Rule Thou in the midst of thine enemies;" meaning, over his subjects, though surrounded with foes: for they are brought under his sway, and feel and acknowledge their subjection. It therefore follows, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Though once they said, Who is the Lord! and we will not have him to reign over us; they are all brought under the rod of his strength. The Gospel has come to them, not in word only, but in power. It has awakened their consciences; it has changed their dispositions; it has made them submit to the righteousness which is of God, and to yield themselves to his service, as those who are alive from the dead. They *were* the servants of sin: but they *now* obey from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered them.

—There is a pastoral rod. Of this David speaks: when addressing the Lord as his shepherd, he says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." This refers to the crook with which the shepherd both walks as he follows, and uses as he manages the sheep. It is the symbol and instrument of his charge and office. The people of God are naturally like lost sheep going astray, wandering upon the mountains of barrenness and danger. He seeks them, and finds them out, and brings them all under his rod. And happy they who are under his care. *He* is their shepherd, and they shall not want. He will make them to lie down in green pastures. He will feed them beside the still waters. He will restore their souls, and lead them in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake. He will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. And the privilege commenced in grace, will be continued and completed in glory. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For *the Lamb* which is in the midst of the throne *shall feed them*, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

MAY 15.

"*I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.*—Ezek. xx. 37.

What is this *covenant?* Some always consider it a kind of stipulation between God and us; in which he proposes to do so much, if we will do so much: thus representing the Supreme Being as a bargainer, getting as good terms as he can, while man, the other high contracting party, agrees to them. But God is said to make a covenant with the earth, and with the beasts of the field. This cannot intend a reciprocal negotiation; but the engagement of God only. It is called a covenant allusively, to signify its stability and certainty; the effect in the one instance being put for the cause in the other. For the same reason this name is given to that gracious constitution for the salvation of sinners through the Mediator, made known in the Scripture for the obedience of faith; and is the very same with what is also called "the mercy promised to the fathers;" and "the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

The *bond* of this covenant is the obligation which it lays upon God who makes it, and upon those who are saved by it. We could not, without profaneness, have talked of *binding* God; but he has been pleased, in his infinite condescension, to bind himself. His heart could have been trusted; but he knew our frame, and our weakness; and to remove all our fearful misgivings, arising from our meanness and guilt, he has brought himself under a covenant engagement. And if it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth it. And he has confirmed his engagement by an oath—and because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself; and also by sacrifice—and the victim was no less than his only begotten Son, and whose blood, therefore, is called the blood of the everlasting covenant. Thus he is bound to be the God of his people. He is bound to save them; to pardon them; to sanctify them; to help them. Bound to make all things work together for their good. Bound to give them grace and glory, and to withhold no *good* thing from them.

It also binds them—Not to atone for their sin—this is already expiated; nor to produce a righteousness to justify them before God—this is already brought in, and on this their hope only relies—but they are bound to obey, and serve, and glorify Him who has done such great things for them. Surely evidence, consistency, gratitude, justice require it. They feel the obligation and acknowledge it, and wish all to know that they are not their own, but bought with a price. They feel the obligation, and it is not irksome; for though they are bound, it is with the cords of a man, and the bands of love. It is the obligation of a mother to press to her bosom her sucking child; it is the obligation of a hungry man to eat his pleasant meat—My meat is to do the will of him that sent me. It is a yoke; but it is like the yoke of marriage to the happy pair who daily bless the bonds. It is a bur

den; but it is like the burden of wings to the bird, which, instead of confining him, gives him the freedom of the skies—My yoke, says the Saviour, is easy, and my burden is light.

Blessed are the people that are in such a case—Their humble confidence can authorise them in every trouble to say, "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire"—and their affectionate zeal, in every temptation, will constrain them to sing,

"All that I have, and all I am,
Shall be for ever thine:
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.

"Yet, if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I should give him all."

MAY 16.

"*And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.*"—Luke ix. 51.

WHITHER he was to be received up is not mentioned. But it is easily understood, especially if we compare the words with other passages. Accordingly the margin refers us to two places; in the first of which Luke says, "Until the day in which he was taken up;" and, in the second, Mark says, "So, then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." The event, therefore, was his ascending to his Father and our Father; to his God and our God. There was the home where he originally dwelt. He speaks of a glory which he had with the Father before the world was. Thus he was rich; but for our sakes he became poor, and made himself of no reputation. He resided on earth for three-and-thirty years in a kind of exile: a prince, higher than the kings of the earth, in disguise; and the world knew him not. But having accomplished the work that was given him to do, he entered into his glory.

And if nothing is left to chance in our minutest affairs, surely there was nothing unarranged with regard to his leaving this world to go unto the Father. Accordingly we here read of the *time* for his being received up. And if they have chronicles above, and days, as we have—what a memorable day would that have been in which, after such an absence, and after such astonishing exploits, and completely vanquishing all the powers of darkness, the everlasting doors were opened, for the King of glory to enter in!

On this, therefore, the Saviour fixed his eye; and this emboldened him to *set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.* For what zeal, what courage, did the determination require! He knew the perilous nature of the journey. He apprehended all that awaited him when he should arrive. He knew that there he should be forsaken—and betrayed—and apprehended—and mocked—and scourged—and crucified. Yet his resolution does not fail him. Lo! I come, says he, to do thy will, O God! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! For he looked—*beyond*—and regarded the blessed result. And this was the glorification of his human nature; the acquirement of his mediatorial reward; the dispensation of the Holy Spirit; the government of the world; the salvation of the Church; the enjoyment of the praises of the redeemed for ever! This was the joy set before him in covenant engagement; and for this he endured the Cross, and despised the shame. For though his soul was to be made a sacrifice for sin, yet he knew that he should rise from the dead, and see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Therefore, as the season drew near, he looked to the issue, and triumphed in the prospect. Now, says he, is the hour that the Son of man shall be—not abased, but—glorified. *Now* is the judgment of this world; *now* is the Prince of this world cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

—So, Christian, should it be with you. There is a time appointed when you also shall be removed from this vale of tears, and be for ever with the Lord. Think of it; and set your face boldly and firmly to go, wherever duty calls. The man who has an amputation to suffer must not dwell on the operation—but must *pass* beyond, to the restoration of health, and the continuance of life. This, Christian, is the way to endure, and to be more than a conqueror. It is to reckon, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed—You may sow in tears, but you shall reap in joy. The road may be rough, but it will soon bring you home.

"Yet a season, and you know,
Happy entrance will be given;
All your sorrows left below,
And earth exchanged for heaven."

MAY 17.

"*If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"—Dan. iii. 17, 18.

CONDUCT so tried, and so triumphant in the trial, must have had some principle to produce it. He who acts without principle, is the slave of impulse, humour, accident, custom; and you can no more rely upon him than upon a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and

tossed. But when a man is governed by principle, he will be consistent in his practice. He may have infirmities, but a sameness pervades his character. He may err, but he is conscientious; and his excellences will appear even in his mistakes and failings. Can we find a principle adequate to *this* heroism? The Apostle tells us it was faith. But faith must have something to lay hold of—and the faith of these young men seizes three things.

The first is, the *power* of God. "Our God whom we serve is *able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace." They knew nothing was too hard for the *Lord*. And we believe in the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. We, indeed, are not to look for miracles: but the power of God is the same as formerly; and there are cases in which the view of it can alone inspire relief. When difficulties multiply, and means fail, and creatures say, Help is not in us—then we must lay hold of his strength, and remember that he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.

The second is, his *disposition*. "And he *will* deliver us out of thine hand, O king." This they deemed probable—perhaps they had a persuasion of it, derived from a divine impression; or deduced from the character of God, and the records of his Word. They had read in the Scriptures, along with the experience of his people, the assurance, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee:" "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Here is another argument of faith—His people eye his goodness, as well as his power; and know that he *will* appear for them, and save them—in his own way, and in his own time.

The third, is a *future state*.—"But if *not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." What! would they refuse, even if death was the consequence? Yes! And this shows undeniably, that they did not consider death as annihilation. They would not have acted thus had they believed that there was nothing beyond the grave. Had they perished in the furnace, their martyrdom *could* not have been their duty—it would have been the sacrifice of fools—their end would have been madness.

This is the very case argued by the Apostle, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable:" "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" God does not require us to sacrifice our being and happiness for ever to his pleasure—It is *not* his pleasure—It *cannot* be his pleasure. By the law of our nature, and the authority of his Word, we are even *commanded* to seek our welfare, and to seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness—and therefore to be willing to give these up, would be disobedience and contempt. But the language was wise and noble, when they knew, that though they fell in the conflict, they should *yet* be more than conquerors; and that, if they lost a dying, they would obtain an immortal life.

It is absurd to suppose the Jews of old had no knowledge of a future state. Search the Scriptures, says the Saviour, for in them ye think ye have eternal life. Abraham, and his fellow-heirs of the same promise, said such things as declared plainly that they sought a country, even a heavenly. David said, Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and *afterward* receive me to glory. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, *acted* upon this belief: and *must* have acted upon it. They endured as seeing Him who is invisible. And what was Nebuchadnezzar, compared with the Almighty? What was the furnace, compared with the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the *second* death? What could they gain by complying, compared with what they would for ever lose? And what could they lose by refusing, compared with what they would for ever gain—We reckon, said they, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

—And *our* faith must regard the future, or we shall be often perplexed and vanquished. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. This believed and realized explains all; harmonizes all; indemnifies all; glorifies all. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

MAY 18.

"*Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*"—Matt. xvii. 4.

—"NOT knowing," we are assured by the Holy Ghost; "not knowing what he said." For had the motion been complied with, how could our Saviour have suffered and died

And if Peter had continued there, how could he have attended to his wife and children? Besides, he was mistaken as to the nature and design of the dispensation; which was only for a confirmation of their faith, by making them witnesses of his glory, and to afford them a glimpse or taste of the heavenly blessedness—The full fruition was for another world. If ever we think of building tabernacles here, we shall soon hear a voice saying, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest."

But though he did not know what he said, he knew *why* he said it. Two things caused his bliss. First, the communion of Saints. And here were not only John and James, but Moses and Elias. And these were not shining statues—they spake—and spake of the Saviour's decease. What a subject! What speakers! How delightful must such intercourse have been!—But the second was the presence of Jesus. And surely it cannot be a question, why it is good to be where He is. With him we are safe; and no where else. He is the source of all delight and knowledge. He is the fountain of honour and excellency. He is the Consolation of Israel. He is all in all.

But where *is* he with his people?—we do not mean as to his essential presence—this is universal; but as to his special and gracious. —He is with them in the closet. There he manifests himself to them, as he does not in the world. There they enjoy an intimacy, a freedom, an unrestrained intercourse with him, such as other company will not allow. Could these beams and rafters, said a good man, pointing to an unceiled roof, speak; they would testify what hours of enjoyment I have had here in communion with him. Of the closet, therefore, they can say, It is good for us to be *here*.

—He is with them in his Temple. Where would you look for a man, but in his own house? And the Sanctuary is the place where the Lord's honour dwelleth. In all places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And have they not found the promise true? Have they not seen his power and glory in the Sanctuary? Of his house, therefore, they can say, It is good for us to be *here*.

—He is with them at his table. His Cross is every thing to a Christian; and here before our eyes Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified among us. What a sublime duty, what an exalted privilege is the Commemoration of his Death! His flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed! Who has not peculiarly found him in this exercise the Tree of Life! Who has not said, I sat down under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste? It is good for us to be *here*.

—He is with them in the furnace. There the Three Hebrew Children found him. The flames only consumed their bands, and set them free; and they were seen walking in the midst of the fire with the Son of God! I will be with thee, says he, in trouble. And if this be fulfilled—and it must be fulfilled—they will have reason to say, however deep the distress—Lord, it is good for us to be *here*.

—He is with them in the vale of death How much will they need him then! Then all other friends and helpers leave them. Then heart and flesh will fail them—What shall we do, they have often said; what shall we do without him then? But they will not be without him. He knows their frame; and his grace is sufficient for them; and his strength shall be perfect in their weakness—Yea, though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he is with them; his rod and his staff they comfort them: and then they have cause to say, Lord, it is good for us to be *here*.

How much more will they be justified in saying this in heaven! There he is with them immediately. There they will see him as he is. There, before the presence of his glory, they will possess fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

But none will be translated thither in person, whose hearts are not sent off first.—None will have their residence in heaven hereafter, who have not their conversation in heaven here.—None will be *with the Lord for ever*, but those that find it their happiness for the Lord to be *with them now*.

MAY 19.

"*He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*"—John xiii. 4, 5.

That he designed this to be exemplary is obvious, from his own declaration after the action had been performed. "Know ye what I have done to you! Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Now it is not necessary that we should resemble him in the very circumstances of the action; but only in the spirit of it. In Popish countries, the ceremony of washing the feet of another, is often performed by persons no

very lowly in heart—sometimes by a cardinal—yea, and even by the Pope himself. But the design is to enforce the *humility of brotherly love;* and to teach us that no service is to be deemed too mean for Christians to perform, when Providence brings it in their way, and the condition of a fellow-creature requires it. We may profess to do this in the abstract, but refuse to afford the actual assistance called for, in particular instances, because the office is too mortifying to the pride of our feelings or manners. But this is not to love without dissimulation. This is to love in word and in tongue; but not in deed and in truth. Many have lost all credit here, by their unfeeling, distant, and disdainful conduct towards their inferiors, when they had the finest opportunities to evince their condescension, if they had any.

It would be well, if all who name the Name of Christ would attend to the admonition of his Apostle—"In honour preferring one another—Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." Job was the greatest man in the East; yet he could say, "If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" And with regard to those sufferers generally overlooked by greatness, yea, and by mediocrity too; and those instances of humbler kindness, which splendid beneficence never thinks of; he could make this affecting appeal: "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (for from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: then let mine arm be broken from the bone."

A great man seldom wants more help than he can purchase or procure. Though he has wasted his substance, and reduced himself so as to deserve starvation; his utmost extremity is superfluous subsistence, compared with the suffering of a worthy character, who is neglected because originally indigent. But the industrious poor should be the objects of our attention, whose distress is brought upon them, not by vice, extravagance, and speculation, but by the providence of God; and whose condition sinks them below observation; so that, in the midst of their trouble, none careth for them.

Services small in their nature, are greatly esteemed by those who are commonly neglected. And in those offices you perform for them, you serve the Lord Christ. They cannot recompense you; but He will graciously say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

Let me, then, hear his blessed invitation—Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Let the same mind be in me, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

MAY 20.

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."—2 Cor. ix. 15.

This gratitude, no doubt, must be due, infinitely due. Yet, to excite and increase our thankfulness, it is desirable to know, not only that the Son of God has been given *for* us, but *to* us; and that he is now actually our *own*. There are some who are satisfied here. They can say, This *is my* beloved, and this *is my* friend: the strength of *my* heart, and *my* portion for ever. But this is not the case with all. Some are asking, with all the anxiousness the importance of the subject requires, Is this unspeakable gift, for which eternity will be too short to praise God, *mine?* In answer to which, allow me to ask,

Do you approve of the design for which he was given? He came into the world to save sinners, in a way equally *gracious* and *holy*. Do you acquiesce in a purpose which involves the destruction of *self* and *sin?*

Have you received him? In the word and means of grace he is presented to us. We read of some who have received Christ Jesus the Lord; and as many as received him were privileged to become the sons of God. Has this act been yours? When Laban saw Abraham's servant laden with presents, he said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord"—Did you ever give Christ such an invitation? "Zaccheus made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully"—Did you ever give him such a welcome? And are you willing to receive him wholly? For is Christ divided? Can you receive him as your prophet, and not as your king? as your priest, and not as your example? Can you enjoy him in his sacrifice, and refuse him in his service? Can

you entertain him in spiritual privileges, and cast him out in spiritual duties!

Have you given yourselves to him? I do not say, your substance only, or your time only. You may subscribe to religious institutions, and attend the means of grace—and keep back the main thing. But have you given him yourselves? The Corinthians gave their ownselves unto the Lord—Can you remember such a surrender? An evening, perhaps—when like Isaac, in the field you said, "Lord, I am thine, save me." The close of a Sabbath, perhaps—when, in your closet, you read, and wept, and kneeled—and then rose, and wept, and kneeled again, and said—"O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over me—henceforth by thee only will I make mention of thy Name."

Do you supremely prize him? To them that believe, he is precious. Paul longed to depart, to be with—James? Isaiah? Moses? No—but to be with Jesus. You have some who are dear to you on earth; you have more in heaven. Perhaps you have a child; lovely here, but a cherub there. Perhaps you have a mother there, whose knees were the altar on which you laid your little hands to pray. Perhaps you have there the dear minister who turned your feet into the path of peace—But, thinking of HIM, can you say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth I desire beside thee?"—Answer these inquiries, and claim this unspeakable gift as your own for ever.

—But here is another question: What use should the possessor make of this Gift? If you are Christians, though you were once darkness, you are now light in the Lord, and must walk as children of light. And much of your wisdom must appear in knowing what a prize you have in your hand.—Make use of him then, in all your duties. Meditation is a duty—Let him enrich, and enliven, and sweeten it. Prayer is a duty—Pray always in his Name.—Make use of him in all your wants. You want cleansing—use him as the fountain open for sin and uncleanness. You want safety—flee to him as your refuge. You want food—and his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed—feed on it.—Make use of him in all your afflictions. Are you bereaved? are you poor? Rely upon him, in whom you possess all things. You know that your Redeemer liveth.

—We have one question more—What can we think of those who disregard this unspeakable gift? What can we think of their ingenuousness—in contemning such infinite goodness and mercy? Of their danger? How can they escape if they neglect so great salvation? Of their misery?—What can a wretch do without him in death? and at the judgment-day?

It is awful to think that the Saviour may become the destroyer. The greatest blessing may prove the greatest curse.

MAY 21.

"*That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.*"—Phil. ii. 16.

THIS is mentioned as an argument, to enforce the duties he had just recommended; "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life." And surely we are to know them that labour among us; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake; and to co-operate with them; and to be zealously concerned to promote their usefulness and comfort.—There is a peculiar relation between the minister and the people of his charge: and, as a well-conditioned flock is the credit of the shepherd; and a well-ordered family the commendation of the master; and the moral and prosperous state of his subjects, the praise of the ruler: so a wise, holy, consistent, amiable, lively, useful church is the honour and happiness of the preacher—He lives, if they stand fast in the Lord. They are his glory and joy.

But why, for this satisfaction, does the Apostle refer to so *late* a period as the day of Christ? Had he no present rejoicing, from their excellences and exertions? He had. Yet he knew that he must *now* rejoice with trembling. He had known many who did run well, but were hindered; who began in the Spirit, but ended in the flesh. He had seen many moral blossoms perishing without fruit; and experience taught him to distinguish between the hope of the spring and the richness of autumn. Persons for a season may rejoice in a minister's light, but in time of temptation fall away. They may hang on his lips, and then break his heart. He only that endureth to the end shall be saved. Then are we made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end—and "the day will declare it."

And till then the true character and condition of those among whom he has laboured, will not be completely ascertained and developed.

Till then, also, his hearers will not be placed beyond the reach of moral harm; or be incapable of injuring the cause they profess.

Till then, also, his aim will not be fully accomplished, which is, to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," and "filled with all the fulness of God."

Then, also, many will acknowledge their obligations to his instrumentality, for their conversion or edification, which he knew

nothing of here. And it will be safer and better for him not to know the extent and degree of his usefulness, till he is secure from the possibility of vanity and pride—Then is the period for rejoicing, when there can be no mistake, no excess, no danger, in the joy.

Oh! may he that watches for my soul, as one that must give an account, do it with joy, and not with grief!—

What a proof is here that there will be a knowledge of each other in heaven! How else could the Apostle say of converts, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming!"

MAY 22.

"*Justified by the faith of Christ.*"—Gal. ii. 16.

Let me remark here the blessing, and the way in which it is obtained.

What is justification? It is not the making us righteous in person, but in state. The Papists confound it with sanctification; and some Protestants do the same. But justification stands opposed to *condemnation*. It is the absolving a man from a charge; the acquitting him when accused; and pronouncing him righteous. Only as *we* are really guilty —*we* cannot be justified by disproving the offence, but by the non-imputation of it, and treating us as innocent. The manner is described by the Apostle: We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth as a propitiation for sin. The blessing is full and complete: for we "are justified from all things." It is permanent and irreversible: "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." It is also a present benefit. The perception of it may be wanting; but the state is real: they *have* passed from death unto life: they *are* accepted in the Beloved. And blessed, says David, is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed in his duties. Blessed in his comforts. Blessed in his trials. For him affliction has no curse. Death, no sting. Eternity, no terror.

This inestimable blessing is obtained by the faith of Christ. We are often curious, and ask for reasons, when we should be satisfied with facts. It is not necessary to be able to explain precisely how faith justifies the soul. It should be enough for us to know that it is a truth clearly revealed.

And since, O my soul, none are justified that do not believe; and all that believe are justified; let me apply my heart unto wisdom. Instead of losing myself in subtle inquiries and angry disputes, let me do two things—Let me observe, first, the importance of this faith. It is, in a sober sense, as important as Christ. What, therefore, is ascribed to him meritoriously, is ascribed to faith instrumentally. He is the well; but by faith we draw water out of it. He is the refuge; but a refuge cannot screen us, unless it be entered. He is the bread of life; but food cannot nourish us, unless it be eaten—and all this is done by faith *only*.

Let me, secondly, ask, seriously and earnestly, have *I* this faith of Christ? Do I believe the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son? And am I repairing to him; and trusting in him alone for salvation? How does my faith sow? Does it "sow in tears?" How does it rejoice? Does it "rejoice in Christ Jesus?" and has it "no confidence in the flesh?" How does it work? Does it "work by love?" How does it travel? How plead? Can I say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of his righteousness only?"

MAY 23.

"*Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*" Matt. xxiii. 8.

Rabbi signifies Master; not a domestic or civil master, having servants or subjects under him; but a master of pupils; a leader, a teacher, having disciples who admire and follow him. It was not an ancient title: we scarcely read of it before the coming of the Messiah. The Scribes and Pharisees were exceedingly fond of this name. "They love," says our Lord, "greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, rabbi." "But," adds he, "be not *ye* called Rabbi."

The Apostles followed this admonition. "We have no dominion," said they, "over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." They did not lord it over God's heritage, but fed them with knowledge and understanding; and were ensamples to the flock. They considered themselves as messengers, deriving all their authority from their employer; and always referred their people from themselves to him. They delivered nothing but what they had received; and called upon those they addressed, not to believe in them implicitly, but to search the Scriptures; to prove all things; and hold fast that which was good. They were offended if persons thought too highly of them, or wished to be named after them. "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul! Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as God gave to every man?" "So, then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

It is now hardly possible to avoid religious names; but we lament that they were ever introduced. Why should parties be called Calvinists, Arminians, Lutherans, Baxterians,

or by any other denomination? If the sentiments held by any of these men are not found in the Sacred Writings, they are not binding upon the conscience, whoever sanctions them: and if they are, why should it be intimated that they have any other origin? Let us be satisfied with the words the Holy Ghost useth, without attaching salvation or damnation to men's definitions of them. The documents are divine and infallible; but who can pronounce the explications to be so?

If we call ourselves by the name of any human authority, let it be an inspired one. Let us call ourselves Paulites, after Paul; or Johnites, after John. But no. The worthy name by which we will be called, is *Christians—after Christ.* All we are brethren—but he *is* our Master; and the voice from the most excellent glory cries, "Hear ye *him.*" His authority was proved by miracles, wonders, and signs. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All he delivers to us is truth—truth unmixed with error—truth of the mightiest importance—truth that can make us free—truth that can make us holy—truth that can make us blessed—for evermore. And as to the mode of his tuition, none teaches like him; so tenderly; so effectually; so perseveringly.

—Will ye also go away? Lord, to whom should we go, but unto thee?

—Will ye also be his disciples? O my soul! refuse not the privilege. Henceforth may I hear—him, watching daily at his gates, and waiting at the posts of his doors. Lead me in thy truth, and guide me; for thou art the God of my salvation: on Thee do I wait all the day.

MAY 24.

"*I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.*"—Deut. iii. 25.

This desire seemed improper. For God had expressly said unto Moses and Aaron, "Because ye believed me not to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." We are poor creatures, and often insensibly transfer to God the effects of our own feeling and conduct. Did Moses then, through infirmity, think that God was changeable? No: but he thought the threatening was not absolute; especially as it was not ratified by an oath, as the exclusion of the people was. For many of God's denunciations, as we see, for instance, in the sentence with regard to Nineveh, have a condition implied, though not expressed. They will be executed *unless* repentance intervenes. Upon this principle it was possible for Moses to hope for a retraction of the interdict.

But the desire was a very natural one. It was natural for him to desire to enter Canaan, even as an object of curiosity, of which he had heard so much; but still more as an object of hope, which had been so long promised, with every enhancement. This it was that had animated the people to leave Egypt. This had encouraged them in all their travels in the desert. This was the end, the recompence of all their toils and sufferings for forty years. And they had now nearly reached it! How painful to miss the prize—when the hand was in the very act of seizing it; and to have the cup dashed—even from the lip!

Yet the desire was refused. And the Lord said unto him, Let it suffice thee—speak no more to me of this matter. For he sometimes refuses the desires of his servants, and the most eminent and endeared of them too. And he does this in two ways. Sometimes he does it in *love.* He denies, because what is desired would prove dangerous and injurious. We should think badly of a father who, if a son asked bread, would give him a stone; or, if he asked a fish, would give a scorpion. But suppose, through ignorance, his son should ask for a scorpion instead of a fish; or suppose he should cry for a sharp instrument; or beg to climb up a steep ladder: would he love his child *then,* unless he rejected his wish? In how many cases must a wise and good parent distinguish between a child's wishes and his wants! He may wish for liberty; but he wants restraint: he may wish for holidays; but he wants schooling: he may wish for dainties; but he wants medicine—Here the love of the parent must appear acting, not according to the wish, but welfare of his child. How well would it have been for the Jews, had God more than once turned a deaf ear to their importunity! They would have a king—and he "gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath." They would have flesh—and he gave them their hearts' desire, but sent leanness into their souls. On the other hand, who does not see, in looking back upon life, how well for him it was that such a scheme failed; that such a hope was crushed! How much evil lurked under the specious appearance, or would have resulted from the indulgence! Who knows what is good for a man in this life? No one but God—the *good* God—

> "Good when He gives, supremely good,
> Nor less when he denies:
> E'en crosses from his sov'reign hand
> Are blessings in disguise."

He also sometimes refuses in anger. Wrath is incompatible with love; but anger is not: anger may even flow from it. Though Christians cannot be condemned, they may be chastened: and the law of the house is that if his children walk not in his commandments, he will visit their transgression with a

rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Hence those who shall be saved eternally, may lie under the present rebukes of Providence; and be refused many things on which they have set their heart, as to station, business, connexions, and usefulness: for them that honour him, he will honour. They may think hard of this at first; but as they discover their unworthiness and desert, they will bow to the dispensation, and say, with David, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." By such conduct, too, Providence reads lessons to others. See, it says, the evil of sin. See how severely God deals with it, even in his own people. And if these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry! If judgment begins at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! And if the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear!

—Yet his desire was partially indulged: "Thou shalt not go over this Jordan: but get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes." This was obviously intended, not to tantalize him, but to be a *mitigation* of the severe sentence. The preservation of his good sight to so great an age, fitted him for the gaze; and probably it was also strengthened and enlarged for this very purpose. The prospect showed him how worthy the country was of all that God had said concerning it; and would give him high and honourable views of the truth and goodness of God, in his Covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Along with this, too, there was exerted the influence of divine grace, which soothed and satisfied him. For by this God can make us easy and contented under the refusal or loss of any comfort, however essential to our happiness it appeared before: so that we behave and quiet ourselves as a child that is weaned of his mother; our soul is even as a weaned child. While, also, his mind was raised to things above, and, in type and emblem, to a better country, into which he was immediately to enter. Then there would be no want of an earthly Canaan.

—Thus, in the midst of judgment, He remembers mercy. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

MAY 25.

"Grieve not the holy Spirit of God."
Ephes iv. 30.

The expression is not to be taken properly and literally, as if the holy Spirit of God was capable of vexation or sorrow. The Divine Nature is not subject to human passions. God's condescension is not to rob him of his glory. When the Scripture ascribes to him actions or affections that imply imperfection, it is in accommodation to our weakness of apprehension. We lisp with infants. And unable to view the shining sun with the naked eye, we survey it in a vessel of water, or through obscured glass.

We grieve a friend when we neglect him, or go contrary to his wishes and interests. And when he is grieved he betrays it. His countenance is not towards us as aforetime. Frowns succeed to smiles. He complains and reproves. He discontinues his visits and correspondence. All this will apply to the grieving of the holy Spirit of God. And there are three reasons why we should not grieve him.—Nothing can be more unbecoming—ungrateful—unwise.

—Nothing can be more unbecoming, if we consider his greatness. The holy Spirit is deserving in himself of all the regard we can express. If a nobleman was calling upon you, common civility would teach you not to hurt his mind. If the king honoured you with his presence, how anxious would you feel not to offend him; how studious would you be to please him in all your actions, and words, and looks. Here all comparison fails. No mortal is honoured like the Christian, with whom the King of kings and Lord of lords deigns even to dwell. And will he not be sensible of this honour? Will he not exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Will he not fall upon his knees, and pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer?"

—Nothing can be more ungrateful, if we consider his goodness. What obligation was he under to you? You were not worthy of the least of all his mercies; you deserved that his wrath should have come upon you as children of disobedience. Had he therefore left you to perish, you would have had no reason to complain. But who remembered you in your low estate? Who quickened you, when dead in trespasses and sins? Who unstopped your deaf ears, and opened your blind eyes? Who turned your feet into the paths of peace? Who enabled you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to life everlasting! Who gave you a disposition, a taste, congenial with the work and enjoyment of heaven? Who sealed you unto the day of redemption? But for his gracious agency, where, and what would you now have been! And are you forgetful of all this? Are you grieving such a benefactor? Is this thy kindness to thy friend?

—Nothing can be more unwise, if we con-

sider his importance to you. As you are deeply indebted to him for the past, so you are entirely dependent upon him for the future. You live in the Spirit, you walk in the Spirit. Grieve the holy Spirit of God! What! would you grieve your *Leader*, and be left to travel alone? Can you find your way without him? Can you learn without this teacher? Must he not guide you into all truth? What! would you grieve your *Helper*, and be left to act alone in your work! Can you worship without the preparation of the heart, and the answer of the tongue, which are from him? Without him, can you order your speech, by reason of darkness? Can you know what to pray for as you ought, unless the Spirit helps your infirmities? What power have you in any duty, unless you are strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man? You may spread your sails, but he must fill them. What! would you grieve your *Preserver*, and be left to contend by yourselves against your enemies? Are you a match for the powers of darkness, and the devices of Satan? The first temptation that assaults you alone, may occasion your sinning and falling: and by this you may cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of—ministers to be discouraged—your fellow-Christians to be distressed—that which is lame to be turned out of the way—while your sin would be ever before you. What! would you grieve your *Comforter*, and lose your hold of the promises, and be unable to discern your evidences of heaven, and feel your hope decline, and your heart sink in the day of adversity; and be in bondage through fear of death—and groan, "Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon my head; and when by his light I walked through darkness, and while as yet the Almighty was with me!"

The comforts of the Holy Spirit can afford such strong consolation, as will revive us in the midst of trouble. According to the Saviour's assurance, when leaving this world, *his* being with us can more than make up for the loss of his own bodily presence. But, "when he hideth his face, who can behold him?" Vain then are friends, ministers, ordinances. "For these things," saith the Church, "I weep: mine eye runneth down with water, because the Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me"—What infatuation to grieve him!

Yet if there were no danger of this, the admonition would not have been given. Let me not be high-minded, but fear. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." I have always at hand an active adversary, the Devil. I am passing through a world lying in wickedness. I carry within me an evil heart of unbelief. Every thing without is rendered dangerous by the sin that dwelleth in me. They who far surpass me in every thing, have been overcome. Let me therefore watch and pray. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Nor let me be satisfied with negative religion. Let it not, O my soul, be enough that I grieve him not. Let me cherish all his motions. Let me walk so as to please him. Let me abound therein more and more.

MAY 26.

"*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*"—Psalm ii. 8.

"THE heathen"—"the uttermost parts of the earth;" viewed in the representations of Scripture, and the reports of historians, travellers, and missionaries, seem a very unenviable acquisition. If it be true, that the whole world lieth in wickedness, it seems fitter to be for the inheritance "and the possession" of Satan, than the Son of God. But two things are to be taken into the account. Notwithstanding the present condition of the estate, it contains very *valuable* and *convertible* materials.

Every human being, however depraved and degraded, is a creature of God. He is the work of his hands, and is fearfully and wonderfully made. He has a soul of more value than the material world. The child of a savage is a richer production than the sun. The sun sees not his own light; feels not his own heat; and, with all his grandeur, is doomed to perish—But that child is the subject of reason; the heir of immortality. That child is capable of knowing, and serving, and resembling God, and of filling a sphere of everlasting action and enjoyment. That child will hear the heavens passing away with a great noise, and see the elements melting with fervent heat, and stand with all the dead, small and great, before God.

And we are also to consider what they may, and will become. Thus the Saviour viewed them, when they were surrendered to him. He pitied them: and he knew he was able to bless them—and he knew that they would not remain what they were; but that for him the wilderness and solitary place should be made glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. He knew it had been said, by Faithfulness and Truth, "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." The more desperate the condition of the patient, the more pleasure does

his recovery afford the physician; and the more does it display his skill and ability. So here. All these captives the Redeemer ransoms; and each of them, as a justified, sanctified, glorified being, will for ever reflect his honour. He found them at hell's dark door; but he raises them above the heavens. He found them in the likeness of the Devil; and he adorns them with the image of God. He found them the disgrace of the universe; and he makes them an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations.

What is so interesting and delightful to a man of taste as alteration and improvement? With what pleasure does he view a piece of rude and barren soil, under his cultivation, looking forth, dressed in living green, and abounding with trees and flowers! What pleasure does a benevolent mind feel, when he views the child he has taken up, exchanging rags for decency, ignorance for knowledge, vicious and idle habits for virtue and industry —and contemplates his comfort, usefulness, and respectability, as the fruit of his kindness and labour! What satisfaction must the Saviour feel to behold, as the effect of his Cross, and his Grace, the renewal of human nature; the deliverance of province after province from the power of Satan; and the kingdoms of this world coming under the influence of the Gospel! What an inheritance—what a possession will the Heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth be to the Messiah, when Paganism, and Mahommedanism, and the man of sin, shall perish! when the Jews shall come in, with the fulness of the Gentiles! when, in every place, incense shall be offered unto him, and a pure offering! when the nation shall learn war no more! when the people shall be all holy, trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified!

We read of two vast gifts of God in the Scripture: the gift of his Son to the world; and the gift of the world to his Son. The first of these is the greatest; and we ought never to think of it without exclaiming, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! But let us think of the other also; and rejoice that our earth is to come under the dominion of the Messiah, and is given to him for this purpose. It is thus to him, as Canaan was to the Jews. Canaan was to them the Land of Promise; and, God having promised it, in vain was every attempt made to keep them from obtaining it. Egypt was plagued; Pharaoh and his army were destroyed; the sea opened a passage for the heirs of promise; Jordan was driven back; and they were brought in triumph to the rest and the inheritance, which the Lord their God had given them. So will it be here. All opposition will be as vain as it is unreasonable. His enemies shall lick the dust. The word is gone out of God's mouth, and shall not return; that to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, until he shall come whose right it is, and I will give it him.

Let us think of his prospects. We have sympathized with him in his agony and bloody sweat; in his cross and passion. Let us exult at the thought, that he is crowned with glory and honour—and has the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. And what an immensity of subjects will he derive from them! and what an infinity of services! and what an eternity of praises and delights! It was the joy set before him—and he shall see of the travail of his soul—and shall be satisfied.

We ought also to rejoice from a principle of benevolence. His dominion involves the happiness of the human race. Nebuchadnezzar, and other conquerors, had nations given into their hand; but they only enslaved, and impoverished, and cursed their subjects. But,

> "Blessings abound where'er he reigns;
> The prisoner leaps to lose his chains;
> The weary find eternal rest,
> And all the sons of want are blest"

MAY 27.

"*The dumb spake.*"—Matt. ix. 33.

This was a natural dumbness, the cure of which was to be one of the miracles attending the Messiah's advent: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an heart—and the tongue of the dumb sing."

But there is a moral dumbness, and the Saviour heals this when he makes us new creatures. Then old things pass away, and all things become new—not physically new, but spiritually new; each faculty becoming new in quality, application, and use. Thus the man has a tongue before, but not a religious one. He speaks before; but now his speech is with grace. Now he speaks—of God—for God—and to God.

He speaks *of* God. Of his perfections. Of his designs. Of his works and ways. Of his word. Of his commands and promises—a theme for angels.

He speaks *for* God. "On his behalf," as Elihu says. In defending his truth. In justifying his people. In recommending his service. In pleading his cause. Wisdom is necessary here; and we are to distinguish between places and seasons, and characters. "A word fitly spoken, how good is it! It is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Yet caution, though it should qualify our zeal, should not quench it. We should be courageous as well as discreet—

"And if some proper hour appear
I'll not be overaw'd;
But let the scoffing sinner know,
That I can speak *for* God."

He speaks *to* God.—And this is the better evidence of our sincerity. For many speak *of* God, and many *for* him, who never speak *to* him. While the world hears them, and the temple hears them, the closet reigns in silence. But the Christian's delight is in God, and the duties and exigences of his spiritual condition will bring him often to his seat; and he will address him much in a way of adoration, and confession, and intercession, and prayer.

If you are the subject of this grace, use it; and be concerned that the words of your mouth, as well as the meditation of your heart, may be acceptable in God's sight. Beware of any return of the old malady. There is an occasional, partial, comparative, dumbness; and it is brought on by sin. This stops our speech. It did so in the case of David, when he had fallen by his iniquity. It not only broke his bones, and deprived him of joy, but of confidence, and filled him with fear and silence—He could neither speak, as he had done, of God, or for God, or to God. It is a sad evil; and, if it be your experience, do—it is the best thing you can do—do as he did. Take the case, and lay it before God, and say—"Open thou my mouth, and my lips shall show forth thy praise."

"Then will I teach the world thy ways;
Sinners shall learn thy sov'reign grace;
I'll lead them to my Saviour's blood,
And they shall praise a pard'ning God.

"Oh may thy love inspire my tongue!
Salvation shall be all my song!
And all my powers shall join to bless
The Lord, my strength and righteousness."

MAY 28.

"*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*"—2 Pet. iii. 18.

If we consider these words as containing two injunctions, may we not view the second as prescribing the means for the accomplishment of the first! It is certain that there is a supreme excellency in the knowledge here recommended; and that he who would grow in grace, *must* grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This knowledge is supposed to be progressive. It was gradual even in its communication to the world. Judaism was the dawn; Christianity, the day. Prophets and righteous men desired to see the things that we see, and did not see them; and to hear the things that we hear, and did not hear them. There are degrees, also, in its personal attainment and experience—Four ways we may grow in this knowledge.

First. In its *extent*. Who has advanced near the extremities of this field? How little do the wisest know of the treasures hid in it!

"The cross, the manger, and the throne,
Are big with glories yet unknown."

Angels know much more than they once did. But they still desire to look into these things—How much more should we!

Secondly. In its *certainty*. This is, and must be, the same in itself; but, as to us, the degree of it depends upon the perception of evidence: and the mind may be led along from possibility to probability, and from probability to full conviction. The firmness of belief may be strengthened by the confirmations of experience. The whole life of a Christian is a series of tests, by which he tries and proves the word of God. He is, therefore, perpetually increasing in the full assurance of understanding, and has his heart established with grace.

Thirdly. In its *influence*. This implies the former, but is distinguishable from it. There cannot be practical knowledge without speculative. But who will not own that there may be speculative knowledge without practical! Who is ignorant of the difference there is between knowing things in theory, and in experience? between the apprehensions of the judgment, and the bias of the will, and the glow of the affections? Who feels, and fears, and loves, according to his belief? Alas! how often do we see and approve better things, and follow worse! How often are the clearest dictates of the understanding, and even convictions of the conscience, counteracted by our appetites and passions! We believe that we are dying creatures, and live as if we were to live here always! We own ourselves under the providence of Him who doth all things well: and we murmur and repine, as if his dealings were unjust or unkind! We doubt not the Saviour's power and love; and yet we cannot trust in him; and are strangers to consolation and peace!

Fourthly. In its *appropriation*. Job could say, "I know that *my* Redeemer liveth." David said, "God *is* the strength of *my* heart, and *my* portion for ever." The first Christians said, "We *know* that the Son of God is come, and hath given *us* an understanding, that we may know Him that is true; and we *are* in him that is true." Who does not want more of this delightful confidence, to raise him above the world, to support him in his trials, to embolden him in his profession, and to enable him to triumph over the fears of death?

O God, preserve me from delusion in a business of everlasting importance! Let me feel a thousand terrors rather than perish with a lie in my right hand. But, if I am thine, save me from the uncertainties I now feel. Give me the full assurance of hope unto the end. Let me know not only that

there are exceeding great and precious promises, but that I am an heir of promise—not only that in the Lord Jesus all fulness dwells, but that I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.

MAY 29.

"*Ye are the children of the Lord your God.*" Deut. xiv. 1.

The Jews were so by nation. All men are so by Creation and Providence. Christians are so by special grace, according to the language of Inspiration—"Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Let us make this relation a standard, by which to estimate four things.

First. The Divine goodness—Here we only follow the example of the apostle John. *He*, even he, could not comprehend it; but he admires it, and calls upon others to admire it with him: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" What manner of love! How rich! how free! how expensive! What difficulties stood in the way! Yet he removed them. How, said He, shall I put thee among the children? But he did it. He not only spared and pardoned us; he not only admitted us into his family as servants, but as sons; and, for this purpose, he gave his own Son for us, and his Spirit to us. "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God, through Christ."

Secondly. The believer's dignity. Secular nobility derives all its lustre from flesh and blood; and if retraced, will be found to originate in the dust of the ground, from which Adam was taken. It has little value, unless in the fancies of men. But our relation to God confers real and durable honour; compared with which, the most magnificent titles in the world are mere shadows and smoke. How did the Jews boast of having Abraham to their father! "Is it a light thing," said David, a subject, "that I should be son-in-law to the king?" But I think of the majesty and dominion of God! The world is his, and the fulness thereof—I behold the productions of the earth, and the wonders of the skies, and say—

"My Father made them all!"

Thirdly. The happiness of the Christian. The relation has connected with it the promise of pardon: and we daily need it: for in many things we offend all. But I will spare him, says God, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. It gives us free access to God in prayer; and inspires us with confidence and hope of success: "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Hence correction: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Hence education: he does not leave the child to himself; but trains him up in the way he should go. Hence provision: He who feeds the ravens, will not suffer the righteous to famish. Their Heavenly Father knoweth what things they have need of before they ask him; and will suffer them to want no good thing. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Many are born to an estate which they never obtain; but here the inheritance is reserved in heaven; and they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, on earth.

Fourthly. The duty of the Saints. Are they all the children of the Lord their God? Then they ought to fear him. If I am a father, where is my fear? This will keep them from offending him. This will make them studious to please him. This will induce them to pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

As his children, they must walk worthy of God, who hath called them unto his kingdom and glory. We have read of a Polish Prince, who carried the picture of his father always in his bosom; and on any particulur occasion, he would take it out, and view it, and say, Let me do nothing unbecoming so excellent a father. Christians, do nothing unbecoming the rank of your family, and the grandeur of your descent. Be harmless and blameless, the sons of God, without rebuke. Be followers of God, as dear children. Be ye perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

MAY 30.

"*Ask of me.*"—Psalm ii. 8.

This is the condition of a very important grant—Ask of me—and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Whatever appears humiliating in the condition to which the Saviour submitted, let it

be remembered that he entered it voluntarily, and knowingly. He was aware that if the children were partakers of flesh and blood he likewise himself must also take part in the same; and that in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren. He must therefore not only suffer, but obey; and though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience. He must therefore pray. Prayer is the act of an inferior nature; and the Word was made flesh. Though rich, he became poor; and made himself of no reputation.

Many objections are made to prayer. Some of them are specious, but they are all founded in ignorance. The best way to answer them is to take our stand on the Scripture, and make our appeal. Does not God derive his character and glory from his hearing prayer! Is not his Spirit the Spirit of grace and of supplication? Is not this his command? Is not this his promise? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." Does he dispense with this—even in the case of his own Son? And can it be dispensable with regard to us? We know his determination: For all these things I will yet be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them—"Ask, and I shall give thee."

But how was *he* to ask? First, when he was on earth, he prayed like one of us. He prayed alone, and in company with his disciples; he prayed in the Wilderness, and in the Garden, and on the Cross: "In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplication, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." Secondly, he continued the presentation of his desire, when he entered heaven. We know not whether this was done vocally, but it was done really. Thirdly, he does it relatively. Thus prayer is made for him continually. And whenever individuals, ministers, and churches, pray for the success of his cause—*He* is asking.

And his prayer, and our praying, are founded on the same consideration; his sufferings and death. It was said, that when the Father should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed, and prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands; he should see of the travail of his soul, and should be satisfied. This was the joy set before him: and having fulfilled the awful condition on which it was suspended, he pleads for it—*He* therefore asks, in his *own* Name, and on his *own* behalf. And *we* ask on the *same* behalf, and in the *same* Name: according to his own direction, "Whatsoever ye shall ask, believing, in my Name, ye shall receive."

And this should encourage and embolden us. There can be no more uncertainty attending the success of our asking, than of his; for herein we are identified with him. There is no unfaithfulness with God; and he hath said, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

If our prayers are sincere, they must be influential; and we shall exert ourselves in the Redeemer's cause. Nor can we labour in vain. We are on the sure, the rising, the prevailing side. Merchants, heroes, politicians, may all weary themselves for very vanity. We are at a certainty. A king shall reign and prosper. "His Name shall endure for ever: his Name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen."

MAY 31.

"*And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.*"—Luke xxiv. 30.

This was not a *sacramental* meal, as when he took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and said, This is my body. Neither was it a *miraculous* meal, as when he took the loaves, and blessed them, and multiplied them. But an *ordinary* meal. Yet he blessed the food. And this he did always. And his example has the force of a law with all his followers—For, "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk as he walked." Hence the command, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in *the name of the Lord Jesus:*" that is, as his disciples, who are not only to believe in him, but to *represent him.*

From *his* observing this practice, we may be sure that it is wise, and useful, and necessary. Sin has brought a curse upon all our enjoyments; and the blessing of God alone can take it off.

> "How sweet our daily comforts prove,
> When they are season'd with his love!"

But how true—

> "'Tis all in vain till God has bless'd."

"Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Can he also abuse the bounties of Providence; who has implored the Divine benediction upon the use of them? Can he indulge in excess?—Will he not add to his faith temperance? It is lamentable, therefore, that such a duty should ever be omitted—or performed with haste and irreverence—as if the performer was ashamed of the performance.

Let the Saviour's conduct also teach us not to confine our religion to extraordinary and sacred occasions. In all our ways let us

acknowledge God. Morning and evening worship is good: but let us be in the fear of the Lord all the day long. It is well to inquire in his temple: but let us abide with God in our calling. We must remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy; but the spirit of devotion is to actuate us during the week, and to induce us, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God. Tell me not what a man is in a storm—in the calm what is he? Not how he behaves himself in sickness—but in health. A Balaam may pray, Let me die the death of the righteous. A David prays, Unite my heart to fear thy name. There is a goodness which depends upon impulse, not principle; upon outward excitement, not upon internal disposition.

There is a devotion that resembles the blaze of straw; but that which is spiritual is like the fire on the Jewish altar—kindled from above, and which never went out. It is a stream fed by a living fountain; not a sudden torrent, however wide or impetuous at the time, produced by the melting of the snow, or a summer's thunder shower. The water, says the Saviour, that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

JUNE 1.

"*I am the vine.*"—John xv. 5.

Ministers are not to preach themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. But he was his own subject—He preached himself. How could he have done otherwise, concerned as he was to be useful? for

> "None but Jesus, none but Jesus
> Can do helpless sinners good."

And *he* knew this far better than we do.—And who was able to declare what he truly was so well as himself?

—Here he calls himself the vine. A very easy and natural image. And natural images are the most preferable in divine things. Many writers and preachers love those allusions which show their learning, and which the uneducated cannot understand. Our Saviour never takes his comparisons from the sciences, and seldom from the arts; but from natural scenery, which is obvious and intelligible to all.

A vine is not so remarkable in its appearance as many other trees. In loftiness, it yields to the cedar. In strength, to the oak. In sightliness, to the palm tree and the fir. The greatness of Jesus was spiritual. He had no earthly pomp and riches. Like his kingdom, he was not of this world. Hence it was said, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

The vine is renowned for its fertility. One single vine, planted by the Empress Lavinia, yielded one hundred and eight gallons of wine in one year—Many grapes grow on one cluster, many clusters on one branch, and many branches on one tree. How many have been saved by the Lord Jesus! In him all fulness dwells. In him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. What clusters were brought from Eshcol, to show Israel the goodliness and fruitfulness of Canaan! And what specimens of heaven; what earnests of the inheritance; what first-fruits of the Spirit, do faith and hope bring believers from him, even while they are in the Wilderness!

The nature of the produce of the vine is delightful and profitable. The fruit is sweet to the taste. The juice it yields cheers and makes glad the heart of man—Give wine to those that be of heavy hearts. It was sometimes used medicinally. The good Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the bleeding traveller. And he brings us health, and cure, and comfort, and delight, and more than angels' food; for

> "Never did angels taste, above,
> Redeeming grace and dying love."

The vine also yields shade, and it was valued for this purpose in the East. Hence we so often read in the Scripture of sitting under the vine and the fig-tree. They had walks and bowers made of these; and while the fruit refreshed them, the shelter screened them from the sun. And he is a shadow from the heat; and rescues us from the evil of every annoyance to which we are exposed. I sat, says the Church, under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The image, therefore, is pleasing and striking, and aids us in our conceptions of him, and communion with him. Yet it teaches us as much by contrast as by comparison. A vine is not always green. It does not always bear. It never bears twelve manner of fruits. It does not endure for ever—But all this is true of him.

The fruit of the vine, if taken too largely, will injure the partaker; but there is no danger here—while we are forbidden to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. The produce of the vine is only for the body, and for time; but his benefits are for the soul, and eternity. Many cannot obtain the advantages of the vine; but none, however poor and mean, are excluded from the participations of Christ. The image, therefore, is but a humble one, and falls far short of his glory. So does every thing that is employed to show forth his worth, his glory, or his grace.

> "Nor earth, nor seas, nor sun, nor stars,
> Nor heaven, his full resemblance bears:
> His beauties we can never trace
> Till we behold him face to face."

JUNE 2.

"*Ye are the branches.*"—John xv. 5.

For whatever he is, they have a relation corresponding with it. Thus, if he is the king, they are the subjects. If he is the shepherd, they are the sheep. If he is the head, they are the members. Therefore, having said to his disciples, I am the vine, he adds—Ye are the branches.

This reminds us of their union with him. The vine and the branches are connected. The latter are even parts of the former: and it would be absurd for a person to say, I did not hurt the vine; I only injured the branches. Why persecutest thou *me?* said the Saviour to Saul, who was only persecuting his followers. He that touches them, touches the apple of his eye. And as he is sensible of their wrongs, so he feels every kindness shown them; and says, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.

This gives them a character of likeness. The branches are the very same kind of wood as the vine; and the very same sap pervades them both. And they that are joined to the Lord are of one spirit. The same mind is in them which was also in Christ Jesus.

This shows their dependence. "The righteous shall flourish as a branch:" but the branch does not bear the tree, but the tree the branch. Whatever likeness there may be, in all things he has the pre-eminence. He is our life and strength. Abide, says he, in me: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me; for without me ye can do nothing.

This proclaims their usefulness. The branches are the beauty and excellency of the vine; and *by* these, its vigour and fertility are displayed. He is glorified in his people. He makes them to blossom and yield fruit. He diffuses his goodness through their prayers and lives. In him is their fruit found, as to its source and support—but they bear it—they are the branches—they are filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Let me learn one thing from all this Let me accustom myself to derive spiritual reflections from all the material objects around me. A taste for natural scenery is pleasing and good in itself. But let me not approach it, as a creature only to enjoy; or a philosopher, only to admire—but as a Christian also, to improve. Let sense be a handmaid to faith. Let that which is seen and temporal, raise me to that which is unseen and eternal.

JUNE 3.

"*Which is our hope.*"—1 Tim. i. 1.

Much has been said in praise of hope. It has been called the main-spring of motion. The soul of enterprise. The balm of life. The soother of care. And the healer of sorrow.

We are not, however, going to speak of hope in general. We therefore say nothing of the hope of the worldling, which is a thing of nought. Or of the hope of the infidel, which is annihilation. Or of the hope of the Antinomian, which is a devil's dream. Or of the hope of the Pharisee, which is a spider's web. Or of the hope of the hypocrite, which is a lie in his right hand. But of *our* hope—as Christians. And what is this? Jesus Christ, says the Apostle—*he* "is *our* hope." He deserves and realizes the character four ways—He is our hope substantially, meritoriously, efficiently, and exemplarily.

He is the object of our hope. There be many that say, Who will show us any good? But *any* good will not answer the wishes of a believer. His supreme aim is the—principal, the—only good—

> "Sufficient in itself alone,
> And needful, were the world our own."—

It is, to win Christ; to be found in him; and in him to be blessed with all spiritual blessings.—The Christian's hope is chiefly laid up for him in heaven. And is not He the essence of all the blessedness there? The place is glorious: but what would it be without His presence? The company is attractive: but what would friends, and saints, and angels be, without communion with him?—We sometimes hear it said, "Well—we are hoping for the same heaven!" But nothing can be more false. A natural man is hoping for one kind of heaven; a spiritual man, for another: and each herein follows his peculiar disposition. I cannot hope for what I do not love and desire. As a man, I may hope for a heaven that shall secure me from hell; and exempt me from all toil and trouble; and furnish me with things in which I feel pleasure. But it is only as a Christian, I can long to depart to be with Christ, which is far better—and be able to say,

> "'Tis heaven on earth to taste his love,
> To feel his quick'ning grace;
> And all the heaven I *hope* above
> Is but to see his face."

He is the ground of our hope. In proportion to the use and grandeur of a building should be the basis. Nothing can equal the vastness and value of the believer's expectation. If we are wise, therefore, we shall inquire what is to bear it up. And no other foundation can any man lay than that is laid, which is Christ. Every thing else we depend upon will prove sand. But here is rock, and he that believeth on him shall not be ashamed. View him as incarnate—Why is not our condition as hopeless as that of devils? Verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abra-

ham—Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself took part of the same. He assumed the nature he would save; and he will save, as surely as he assumed it. View him as the gift of God—God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten. What can discourage us now! If our unworthiness, or the greatness of the blessing, could prove a hinderance to the Divine goodness, it would have operated earlier; and he would have withholden from the guilty *this* unspeakable gift—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also give us all things! But His goodness is wise goodness, just goodness! It must be as honourable to himself as it is beneficial to us—and we behold his Son set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness. Sin is punished, while it is pardoned. Even the Law has nothing to complain of in our deliverance—it is much more glorified in our salvation, than it would have been by our destruction. One died for all; and he was infinitely more than all. Do we question whether he finished the work that was given him to do; and whether it was an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour; and whether he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied? Behold him discharged from the grave, and ascending up on high, and receiving gifts for men, even for the rebellious, and entering into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us! What can we desire more? If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more now, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Will not this suffice? He raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our *faith and hope might be in God.*

He is the author of our hope. For it is not natural to us, neither is it derived from ourselves; but he produces it in us by his Holy Spirit. Means may be used; but the excellency of the power is of him, and not of them. Hence, says the Apostle to those who were glorying in men, Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? Every thing in the new world is done by the Spirit of Christ. Under a conviction of guilt enough to condemn us a thousand times over—did we find it an easy thing to hope in God at first, and believe that he was pacified towards us for all that we had done? and that we were accepted in the Beloved? Have we proved it an easy thing since, to keep this hope lively and flourishing? or even to maintain it at all? How often should we have said, My hope is perished from the Lord, and have given up all our profession, but for "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," in glorifying him afresh—according to the promise, "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

He is also the model of our hope. For though he is unspeakably more than our example, he is nothing less; and the higher views we have taken of him do not hinder, but, indeed, the more require our saying, that the same mind which was in him must be in us—that we must walk even as he walked—that we must pray as he prayed—fear as he feared—and hope as he hoped. And how did he hope? "I will," said he, "put my trust in Him." He was remarkable for this. It was not to quote prophecy, that his insulters, when he was on the cross, said, "He trusted in God: let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God"—It was to reproach him for the confidence in God, which they knew he had professed to exercise. It will be well, if our enemies can revile us for nothing worse. David seems early to have been dedicated to God; but it was in the name of the Holy Child Jesus he spake, when he said, "Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly." From his earliest infancy, from the first exercise of reason, he honoured him—Nor did he ever fail in his confidence in God. In every extremity he trusted in him. Even when in anguish on the cross, and dying, he cried, "*My* God, *my* God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—"Father, into *thy* hands I commit my spirit." His confidence, also, was equally cheerful. He sung a hymn when he was entering the garden of Gethsemane. Though a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, instead of murmuring, he said, "In the midst of the Church will I sing praises unto Thee." Thus may I bear the image of the heavenly, till he shall appear, and I shall be perfectly like him; for I shall see him as he is.

JUNE 4.

"The woman then left her water-pot."
John iv. 28.

THREE reasons may be assigned for this—Perhaps she left it from kindness to our Saviour and his disciples. His disciples had gone into the city to buy meat, and had just returned; and they were now going to partake of their homely fare. But for beverage, they had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep. She therefore leaves them her vessel, to enable them to draw and drink. *Female* kindness, and contrivance, and accommodation, are as quick as thought; and need no prompter. I admire the simplicity

of early hospitality. See Rebekah with Abraham's steward: "And she said, Drink, my lord; and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink." Ah! ye generous hearts! who wish to do good, and feel your want of power—do what you can. And remember the Saviour's words: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Perhaps she left it from indifference. She was now so impressed and occupied with infinitely greater and better things, that she forgets the very errand that brought her to the well. The feelings of new converts are peculiarly strong and lively. The eternal realities and glories that open to their view, dazzle their minds, and render them incapable of distinctly observing other objects. Considering the infirmity of our nature, it is not to be wondered at, if the powers of the world to come, and the "one thing needful"—the care of the soul, should, for the time, engross all their attention, and make them *too* heedless of other claims.

Hence what we should censure in others, we excuse in young beginners, especially if they are suddenly awakened. I say, excuse—for we never wish to justify ignorance, imprudence, and rashness. God is not the God of confusion: "Let every thing," says the Apostle, "be done decently, and in order." Religion is not to draw us off from our business and callings. Neither are we to leave our places and stations in life, even in pursuit of things good in themselves. When the demoniac had been dispossessed, he besought the Saviour that he might be with him—Yet "Jesus suffered him not;" but said, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done for thee. And, says Paul to the Thessalonians, "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands"—to provide things honest in the sight of all men; to maintain your families without dependence; and have, to give to him that needeth; and to preserve your religion from censure. We are not, therefore, to abandon our water-pots. We are not to be careless of our worldly substance; but to preserve and use it. Witness the cautions in Scripture against suretyship, and *backing bills*, and the admonition, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."—Yet those who are born from above, and bound for glory, are only strangers and pilgrims upon earth: and they who have found the pearl of great price, will not, and cannot, feel towards worldly things as they once did. They cannot be so anxious to gain them; so overjoyed in possessing them; so depressed in losing them. And they will be willing to forsake whatever the service of God requires them to part with, however dear or valuable. Thus Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom, upon hearing the call, "Follow me," "arose, and followed him."

Perhaps she left it, as it would have proved a hinderance to her speed. The king's business requires haste. In this she was now engaged; and burning with zeal, she could not bear the thought of losing a moment in communicating the knowledge she possessed; and of saying to her neighbours, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did—Is not this the Christ? She knew the importance of the case. And she knew the brevity and uncertainty of the opportunity. It was not the gratification of their curiosity—it was their life. And if he withdrew from the well before they arrived, the day of their visitation might never return.

Upon the same principles, let us get rid of every impediment, and avoid every delay, not only in gaining good for ourselves, but in doing good to others. All is hanging—upon the moment! "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

JUNE 5.

"*Be thou their arm every morning.*
Isaiah xxxiii. 2.

This is a prayer for others. And when we repair to the throne of the heavenly grace we should never forget our fellow-Christians. But those will never pray earnestly, or even sincerely, for others, who do not pray for themselves. Every believer, therefore, includes himself in the number of those for whom he implores the blessing—"Be thou their arm every morning."

He is made sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency. He knows, he feels, and he increasingly knows and feels, his need—of an arm—a Divine arm—every morning.

—For what purpose?

He needs this arm to defend him in all his dangers, and to keep him from all evil, especially the evil of sin, that it may not grieve him.

He needs this arm to uphold him under his burdens. The pressure often urges him to exclaim, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."

He needs his arm to lean on, in all his goings. What a journey lies before him! And what step can he take alone! This is the image of the Church. She is represented as coming up out of the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved.

And as this arm is necessary; so it is sufficient; and it is kindly held out in the promises and invitations of the word—"There,"

says God, 'let him take hold of my strength." And we take hold of it by faith and prayer.

Let me then avail myself of the privilege —Be thou my arm every morning. Let me lean—and converse with thee. Let me lean and feel thee at my side. Let me lean—and go forward without dismay or discouragement. "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

JUNE 6.

"*And walk humbly with thy God.*"
Micah vi. 8.

Why not joyfully? There is a foundation laid for this. It is their privilege; and it is said, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord. This is not, however, absolutely necessary. In a sense, Christians may go on without it. We have known much self-denial, and deadness to the world, and spirituality of devotion, and zeal for the glory of God and the welfare of others, in persons who may be said to be saved by hope rather than confidence. But with regard to humbleness of mind, this is indispensable—*always*, and in—*every* thing—and *no* progress can be made without it. So that when Luther was asked what was the first step in religion, he replied, Humility; and when asked what was the second, and the third, answered in the same way. And Peter admonishes Christians to be clothed with humility; as if he would say, This is to cover, to defend, to distinguish, to adorn all. But how is our walking humbly with God to appear?

It is to appear in connexion with divine truth. Here God is our teacher; and if, as learners, we walk humbly with him, we shall cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ: we shall sacrifice the pride of reason; and having ascertained that the Scriptures are the word of God, and discovered what they really contain, we shall not speculate upon their principles, but admit them on the divine authority. Nothing can be more proud and vain than to believe no more than we can comprehend, or can make appear to be credible in itself. Is not this founding our faith on knowledge, and not on testimony? Is not this trusting God like a discredited witness in Court, whose disposition is regarded only as it is collaterally supported! Is this honouring his wisdom, or veracity? Is this receiving with meekness the engrafted word? Is this receiving the kingdom of heaven as a little child?

It will appear in connexion with divine ordinances. Here we walk with God as worshippers; and if we walk humbly with him, we shall have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear. We have, indeed, in Christ, boldness and access with confidence: but it is by the faith of him; that is, by the confidence of one who feels his encouragement derived from a mediator. We may come boldly to the throne of grace: but it is to obtain *mercy*, and find *grace* to help us: the boldness, therefore, can only be the boldness of the indigent and the guilty, who have nothing of their own to plead. We approach him as a father: but if I am a father, says He, where is mine honour? We have heard some address the Supreme Being with such levity and freedom as they would not have used to a fellow-creature a little above their own level in life. We should keep our feet when we go to the house of God. He is in heaven and we upon the earth, therefore our words should be *few*.

It will appear in connexion with his mercies. Here we walk with God as our benefactor: and if we walk humbly with him, we shall own and feel that we have no claim upon God for any thing we possess or enjoy. Am I indulged? I am not worthy of the least of all his mercies. Am I distinguished?

"Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more."

Am I successful? I shall not ascribe it to my own skill, or the power of my own arm. I shall not sacrifice to my own net, or burn incense to my own drag. The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

It will appear, with regard to our trials. Here we walk with God as our reprover and corrector: and if we walk humbly, we shall not charge him foolishly; we shall not arraign his authority; or ask, What doest thou? We shall not expose ourselves to the reflection, Thou hast smitten them, and they have not grieved. We shall be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live. We shall be dumb, and open not our mouth, because He does it. Or if we speak, it will be to acknowledge that his judgments are right, and that in faithfulness he has afflicted us. "I mourn; but I do not murmur. I wonder not that my troubles are so heavy; but that they are so light. I more than deserve them all—and I need them all. I would not only bear, but kiss the rod. It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."

It will appear, with regard to our conditions. Here we walk with God as our disposer and governor: and if we walk humbly, we shall hold ourselves at his control; we shall be willing that he should choose our inheritance for us; we shall not lean to our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him. We shall be satisfied with our own allotment; and learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content. We

shall abide in the callings wherein his providence has placed us, and not be eager to rise into *superior* office, feeling our unfitness for them, and fearful of their perils; saying, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quited myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."

It will appear, with regard to our qualification and ability for our work. Here we walk with God, as our helper and strength; and if we walk humbly, we shall be sensible of our insufficiency for all the purposes of the divine life. We shall feel that we know not what to pray for as we ought, unless the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities; that the preparation of the heart, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord; that with regard to the exercise of every grace, and the performance of every duty, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can we, except we abide in him, for without him we can do nothing. Did Peter walk humbly with him, when, even after the warning he had received, he leaned on his own resolution for superior constancy? Here humility is—to fear always; and—to pray, Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.

It will appear, with regard to the whole of our recovery. Here we walk with God, as a Saviour; and if we walk humbly, we shall not go about to establish our own righteousness, but submit ourselves unto the righteousness which is of God: and acknowledge that we have nothing to glory in before him. "Not by works of righteousness which I had done, but according to his mercy he saved me. I look to the rock whence I was hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence I was digged. How long did he wait for me! What pains were used in vain to bring my heart to him! He was found of me, when I sought him not. And how little have I attained! I am still an unprofitable servant. The sins of my holy things would condemn me—I must look only for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. If I am called, he called me by his grace. If I have a good hope, it is a good hope through grace. By the grace of God I am what I am."

Happy this humble walker with God! God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

"All joy to the believer! He can speak—
Trembling yet happy, confident yet meek.
Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hoped, but in thy righteousness divine.
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child;
Howe'er performed, it was their brightest part,
That they proceeded from a grateful heart,
Cleansed in thine own all-purifying blood
Forgive their evil, and accept their good;
I cast them at thy feet—my only plea
Is what it was, dependence upon thee—
While struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never failed, nor shall it fail me now.
Angelic gratulations rend the skies;
Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise;
Humility is crowned, and Faith receives the prize.

JUNE 7

"*The Lord is our Judge.*"—Isaiah xxxiii. 22.

In ancient times the character of a judge was united with that of a sovereign. To deliver the award of acquittal, condemnation, or pardon, was the exclusive prerogative of majesty. Even in our days the sentence pronounced by the appointed expositors of the law must have the fiat of the monarch before it can be fulfilled.

The word Judge is frequently in the Scripture synonymous with Ruler. But here, the Lord, as "our Judge," is distinguished from the Lord, as "our Lawgiver" and "our King:" the term should therefore be taken in its more peculiar meaning. And this view of God should blend with every other character he sustains: not to depress hope; but to prevent presumption: not to hinder our access to God; but to sanctify us when we come nigh him: not to inspire gloom; but to exclude from us all that carelessness and levity so inconsistent with our dependence and responsibility. "If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

He is our future Judge. So then, says the Scripture, every one of us must give account of himself to God: God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing. And who could bear the thought of this process, without the knowledge of a Mediator! The only way to find safety in that day, is to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life: and to be found in him. He is our advocate with the Father: and he is the propitiation for our sins. The charges brought against us are all true; and we have nothing to offer even in our own extenuation. But we appeal to our Surety; and he answers for us. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died: yea, rather, that is risen again: who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.

He is our Judge at present. And the Apostle speaks of it as a privilege of the Gospel dispensation, that "we are come to God, the Judge of all."

Are you perplexed about the path of duty, and yet you must move forward, while importance is attached to every step? Refer yourselves to his unerring counsel. Be influenced and encouraged by the command and the promise—"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own un

derstanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths!"

Is your spiritual state doubtful to your own minds? And do you dread delusion! Present th case before him; and say—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Do you lie under the misapprehension of friends, and the reproaches of enemies? Say, with Job, "Behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high." How often did David turn from the groundless and cruel censures of men, to Him who knoweth all things! "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely, I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child." "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence: let thine eyes behold the things that are equal." Are you reviled? Revile not again. Do you suffer? Threaten not—but commit yourselves to Him that judgeth righteously. It is pleasing to have the approbation of our fellow-creatures; but there is—a higher—a juster—a more merciful tribunal. It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment. He that judgeth us is the Lord. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God."

JUNE 8.

"*The grace that is in Christ Jesus.*"
2 Tim. ii. 1.

Grace is connected with the whole of our recovery as sinners. It is all in all in every part of our salvation. Whether he is chosen, or redeemed, or justified, or converted, or sanctified, or preserved, or comforted—the believer will acknowledge, By the grace of God I am what I am—not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

But where is this grace to be found? The Apostle tells us, when he speaks of it, as the resource of Timothy, both as a minister and a Christian—Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is *in Christ Jesus*. As mediator, he is the principle, and treasury of it, with regard *to us*.

It is in him exclusively. And we may as well think of finding snow on the bosom of the sun, or water to cool the tongue in hell, as to think of finding elsewhere than in him, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As Pharaoh said to the famishing multitudes that cried to him for corn, "Go unto Joseph, he has all the corn;" so perishing sinners are sent to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places—in Christ. If there was only one well in the vicinity of a place, this would soon become the scene of concourse, and hither all the inhabitants would repair or die—And to him shall the gathering of the people be. If any man thirst, said he, let him come unto me and drink. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other Name given under heaven among men, whereby they must be saved. And what Christian will refuse to join in the ascription, Of *his* fulness have *all* we received, and grace *for* grace?

It is in him all-sufficiently. For it is not in him as water in a vessel, which, though as large as the Brazen Sea, would, by constant drawing, be soon drawn dry; but as water in a spring, which, though always flowing, is always as full as ever. It is not in him like light in a lamp, which, however luminous, consumes while it shines, and will soon go out in darkness; but, like light in the sun, which, after shining for so many ages, is undiminished, and is as able as ever to bless the earth with his beams. There never has been, and there never will be, never can be a deficiency in him: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is in him relatively. He has it for the use and advantage of his people. Is he head over all things? It is to his body, the Church. Has he power given him over all flesh? It is that he might give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. Is he exalted at the right hand of God? It is to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Did he receive gifts? It was for men, and even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Many trustees are faithless to their office. The rich have wealth for the poor; but it is either hoarded by avarice, or squandered by extravagance; so that the poor often share but little of it, and the design of the proprietor is subverted by the baseness of the steward. But here there is no danger. He to whom all our welfare is entrusted, will be faithful, not as a servant, like Moses; but as a Son over his own house. His work falls in with every disposition of his heart. He so loves the recipients of his bounty, that he even died for them, and rose again. The power and authority to bless them was the joy set before him; for which he endured the Cross, and despised the shame.

And it is wisely in him. Could we *see* no reason for it, we ought to believe in the propriety of the dispensation. God does all things well; and we may always infer the rectitude of any instance of his conduct even from his adopting it. And when he has *told* us that a particular course of action "became him," it is absurd to speculate, and profane to object. But it is easy to apprehend the

wisdom of God in his being pleased that *in him* should all fulness dwell. It is thus infinitely secure. Adam had all in his own hand, and soon failed, and ruined his whole race. And should we act better than he! But "this man abideth ever:" and therefore the Covenant, of which *he* is the head, is everlasting, ordered in all things and *sure*. By this appointment also, there is rendered necessary a communion between Christ and Christians, equally honourable to him, and beneficial to them. Let me explain this by a simple reference. An infant, when born, if left to himself, would perish: for he is entirely unequal to his own support. But he is not abandoned. Provision is made for his nourishment—Where? In another? In whom? The one—above all others interested in him—and whose relation to him—whose anguish on his behalf—whose love—will always yield him a welcome access to her bosom; and the mutual action of giving and receiving will endear the babe to the mother, and the mother to the babe. It is well we cannot live independent of Christ Jesus. How much are his glory and our welfare connected with the blessed necessity of our daily and hourly intercourse with him!

JUNE 9.

"*And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.*"—Acts iii. 2.

What an object of distress was here! Some, if they are poor, are strong and healthful; and limbs and labour are sufficient for them. And some, if they are sickly and infirm, have wealth; or relations and friends that can afford them support. But here penury and helplessness are combined. The sufferings of some are accidental, and endured for a season only; but this man's affliction entered the world with him, and upwards of forty years he had endured the calamity.

What a vale of tears is this earth! To what a variety of evils are the human race exposed! Oh! could we see all!—could we see a little of the millionth part! What is a burial-ground! a field of battle? a hospital? every dismembered, disordered body? but a commentary upon sin as the text! For sin

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe."

Can we see such a case as this, and not be thankful for our exemption and preservation? Shall we say, He deserved to be such a cripple; but I did not? Rather, shall we not say, By the grace of God, I am what I am?

Such an instance of misery is presented to try our disposition. The eye affecteth the heart; and was designed to do it. None but a Priest or Levite will pass by on the other side. Such sights will attract the notice of the humane, and the merciful, and move all his bowels of compassion, and put in requisition all his powers of relief. Job, even with regard to his prosperity, which too often makes men insensible and careless, could make this appeal: "When the ear heard me then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame."

As the only expedient of this poor wretch was begging; so, to give him an advantage, they placed him daily at the Beautiful gate of the temple, to ask alms of them that went in. This was wise. Surely he who is going to seek mercy, will be ready to show it. Surely he who is going to pray for pardon, will not be unforgiving and implacable. "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." What communion hath light with darkness? What fellowship can the cruel and uncharitable have with him who is love itself?

Piety without benevolence is hypocrisy. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." The tongue of men and angels, without charity, is as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. The gift of prophecy, the understanding of all mysteries, and all faith so that we could remove mountains, would be nothing without charity. How such a man, whatever be his profession, can be a partaker of divine grace, perplexed even an inspired Apostle. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

How well he adds—"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

"And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him"

JUNE 10.

"*He delighteth in mercy.*"—Micah vii 18.

Causes are best discovered in their effects. We determine the nature of the spring by the quality of the streams. The tree is known by the fruits. We judge of men's principles

and dispositions, by their pursuits and conduct. God himself, so to speak, submits to be examined in the same way. To ascertain what he is, we have but to consider what he does. The things the Scripture testifies concerning him, are confirmed and exemplified by the facts to which it refers us. Thus says the Church—"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God." Is he called, "The God of all grace?" "The Father of mercies?" Is it said, "He is rich in mercy?" "He delighteth in mercy?" Let us pause and reflect; and we shall find the proofs and illustrations more wonderful than the assertion itself.

We are saved by hope; hope is the first step in the return of a sinner to God; and "what hath God wrought," to gain the confidence of our guilty, and therefore foreboding and misgiving minds! Here let us follow the example of the inspired John—"What is it that arrests and enraptures his attention!" "Herein is love." Where? In what? "Herein is love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Not that he would overlook the other doings of God; but here *he* saw most clearly that "God is love." God's soul delights in his own Son, yet he would seem to delight more in mercy; for when he met with him and us on Calvary, he said, *Thou* shalt die, and *they* shall live. It therefore pleased the Lord to bruise *him;* that by his stripes *we* might be healed; and, through his sweet-smelling sacrifice, become dearer to God than if we had never sinned. And we must here take in, not only the expensiveness of the act, but the character of the objects. It is the reasoning of another Apostle: "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And having made the provision, so that all things are now ready—would he endeavour to awaken our attention to it! would he send forth the ministry of reconciliation to beseech us to accept it—unless he delighted in mercy!

He delights, also, not only in the exercise of mercy *to* us, but *by* us. He, therefore, would not leave mercy to the operation of reason and religion only; but, as our Maker, he has rendered it a law of our being. By our very physical constitution pity is an unavoidable emotion. When we see the pain and distress of a fellow-creature, the eye affecteth the heart. We involuntarily feel an uneasiness, which prompts us to succour him, even to relieve ourselves. As far, indeed, as this is implanted in us, it is a mere instinct. But who produced it there? Who made it natural? Who rendered it so difficult to be subdued and destroyed, but a Being who delighteth in mercy? Besides, though it be originally an instinct only, by cherishing it, we render it a virtue; and, by exciting and exercising it from religious motives, we turn it into a Christian grace.

And see what stress he has laid upon it in his word. How often does he enjoin it! How dreadfully has he threatened the neglect of it! And what promises has he made to the practice of it! "He shall have judgment without mercy, that showed no mercy." "But blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." He has told us, that no clearness of knowledge, no rectitude of opinion, no fervour of zeal, no constancy of attendance on ordinances, no talking of divine things, will be a compensation for charity. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him!" And hence the pre-eminence our Saviour gives it in the proceedings of the last day. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." The language has been perverted, for men dream of merit, where, above all things, we need mercy. This word "for" is here not causative, but evidential—just as we may say, the spring is come, *for* the birds sing: the singing of the birds does not cause the coming of the spring, but is the effect and proof of it. But even this distinction affords the merciless no favour: for though the practice here so noticed be not the procuring of the blessedness, it is the character of the blessed. On every ground, therefore, the man who is a stranger to it, is not entitled to hope. For which reason, too, our Lord goes on to the subjects of condemnation. And who are these! Tyrants? robbers? murderers of fathers and mothers? perjured persons? No—but the slothful and the selfish—the unkind tongue—the close hand—the unfeeling heart—the unpitying eye—the foot that knew not the door of misery. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not."

Let us, therefore, not only admire, but let us be followers of Him who delighteth in mercy. We cannot love him, unless we are concerned to please him; and we cannot please him, unless we are likeminded with him. Neither can we enjoy him. Resem-

dlance is the foundation of our communion with him. He only that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. "BE YE THEREFORE MERCIFUL, EVEN AS YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN IS MERCIFUL."

JUNE 11.

"It came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."—Gen. xxvii. 1—4.

IN Isaac's blindness we see one of the frequent accompaniments of age. Age is generally an aggregate of privations, diseases, and infirmities. If, by reason of strength, we reach fourscore years, the strength then becomes labour and sorrow: labour in the preserving, and sorrow in the possession.

"Our vitals, with laborious strife,
Bear up the crazy load;
And drag the dull remains of life
Along the tiresome road.

A powerful reason why we should remember our Creator in the days of our youth, that we may have a resource, when the evil days come, in which we shall say, I have no pleasure. What a privilege, when exercised with loss of sight, and of hearing; with trembling of limbs, and sleepless nights; and fearful apprehensions, and failure of desire; to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever: and to hear him saying, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

—The reflection of Isaac upon his mortality may be adopted by every individual, whatever his condition, or health, or age. All are ignorant of the time of their dissolution. For the human race dies at all periods, as well as in all circumstances: and we know not what a day may bring forth. But when Isaac says, "I know not the day of my death," he means that it was near; and that every day might be reckoned as his last. Death is not far from every one of us. But while, as the proverb says, the young may die, the old must die. And it becomes the aged to think frequently and seriously of their departure as at hand. They should prepare for it; and regard zealously the call of every present duty. It was the prayer of Moses, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." It was the profession of our Lord and Saviour, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work." It was the admonition of Solomon: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

Thus Isaac was roused into a concern to finish his work before he finished his course: "Now, therefore, take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die." Observe, he speaks of doing it while yet alive—not afterward. In like manner, Elijah, when waiting for his ascension into heaven, said to Elisha, "Ask now what I shall do for thee, *before* I be taken up from thee," believing his intercourse with him, and his acting for him, would then be terminated. This is a solemn and should be a useful thought. Look at your children, your relations, your friends, your neighbours, and see in what way you can serve your generation. *Now* you can bless them by your prayers, your counsels, your example, your liberality: but all these opportunities are confined to life; and this life is a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away! Isaac did well in seizing the present moment to set his house in order before his death. But there are two things in which he was blameable.

First. He shows too great a regard for the indulgence of his appetite. It is mournful to see a good man, and especially an old man, instead of mortifying the deeds of the body, studying his sensual gratification, and making provision for the flesh, not to fulfil the wants, but the lusts thereof. Carriages should be dragged as they are going down hill.

Secondly. He was more influenced by natural affection, than a regard to the will of God. He wished to make Esau heir; but God had expressly declared, "the elder shall serve the younger." Isaac could not have been ignorant of this. Had he forgotten it? Or did he disregard it? Here we see his frailty. Yet this does not render the purpose of God of none effect. His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. Rebekah, on the other hand, was fond of Jacob—and a father has no chance against a mother, who has a favourite whom she is determined to advance; especially such a selfish, crafty, cunning creature as was here at work. Rebekah's aim, indeed, fell in with God's design; but this concurrence arose, not from her piety, but her partiality. Her conduct was unjustifiable and sinful: for we must not do evil that good may come. She had the Divine promise on the side of her preference; and she should have rested in the Lord, and

waited patiently for him; and not have fretted herself in any wise to do evil. "He that believeth maketh not haste." Had she quietly committed her way unto the Lord, he would have brought it to pass, without those wretched consequences that afflicted the family. For God uses instruments without approving of them: and though he makes the folly and passions of men to praise him, he fails not to prove that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake him, and to act without his fear in our hearts.

—How painful would it be to go on, and see a mother teaching her child to tell lies; and to see a son imposing on the blindness of an aged father! We have no notion that Rebekah was ever religious. And what proof have we that Jacob was pious at this time?—Was he not converted in his journey from Beersheba to Haran? At Bethel God met with him; and there he spake with us.

JUNE 12.

"*The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*" Exod. xiii. 21, 22.

This institution was necessary: for there was no path in the desert; and they had no maps, no pioneers, no guides. But, says God, I have not brought you out of Egypt to leave you to wander and perish in the wilderness—Behold your conductor unto the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you. Accordingly, by this, they were to be regulated in all their journeying. As this rose, they rose. As this paused, they paused. As this turned to the right hand or to the left, they turned. It sometimes called them to leave a more endeared spot, and to stop in a less inviting scene; but they were not at liberty to cling to the one, or decline the other: the signal was instantly decisive. This pillar was obviously nothing less than a real miracle; yet how little were the observers affected by it? They sinned, and even committed idolatry with this hovering prodigy always over them! We are prone to ascribe too much moral efficacy to such supernatural appearances. They soon became as unimpressive and uninfluential as the ordinary means of grace are with us.

It was a symbol of the Divine Presence—"The Lord was in the pillar." It was this nearness of God that insured their safety, and gave them their distinction and pre-eminence. There he was always at hand, always in view. "And," says Moses, "what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?"

But how extensively adapted was this provision to their state and exigences! It was both a pillar of a cloud, and a pillar of fire, to lead them in the way—The one appearance was for the day; the other for the night. Fire by day would have added to the dazzling and fervidness of a burning sky—the pillar was therefore a cloud by day, and screened them like a large umbrella from the scorching rays of the sun. Cloud by night would have added to the gloom, the darkness, and the dread of danger—the pillar was therefore a fire by night, to lick up the unwholesome damps, to warm the chilling atmosphere, and to afford them a light, by which they could see to move about in their tents, and also to travel, as they often did after the sun was set.

If this ordinance showed his wisdom and goodness, the continuance of the blessing evinced his patience—for, notwithstanding their unworthiness, and their provocations, and their various corrections, this pillar was not taken away from before the people, till they reached the border of Jordan, and came to their journey's end!

He has a people for his Name now. They are only strangers and pilgrims on earth, bound for a better country, that is, a heavenly. This they would never reach, if they were left to themselves. But the God of Israel is with them. They have not the same sensible proof of his presence as the Jews had. Yet they have real evidence of it; and it is satisfactory to their own minds. He keeps them from falling. He accommodates himself to their conditions. He is a very present help in trouble. He makes his goodness to pass before them. He leads them by his word, and his Spirit, and his providence. He has also said, I will *never* leave thee, nor forsake thee. Therefore they may boldly say, This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto *death*.

"Thus, when our first release we gain,
From Sin's old yoke and Satan's chain
We have this desert world to pass,—
A dang'rous and a tiresome place.

"He feeds and clothes us all the way;
He guides our footsteps lest we stray;
He guards us with a powerful hand;
And brings us to the promised land."

JUNE 13.

"*The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar.*"—Numb. xvi. 38.

He had solemnly forewarned and admonished the rebels themselves before they suffered. and thus, in wrath he remembered mercy. When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who headed the conspiracy, were buried alive; and their companions, the two hundred and fifty princes, men of honour, were burned with fire; he would make them beacons; and prevent others from coming into the same condemna-

tion. Orders, therefore, were given to take up the censers in which they had dared to burn incense; and make of them broad plates to cover the altar of burnt offering—that they might "be a sign unto the children of Israel:" that is, a memorial to the Levites, and the comers thereunto, of the revolt of these men; and that they were punished for invading an office which God had forbidden them.

Whence we note, that the sin which is hurtful to the transgressors should be useful to the observers.

"These sinners against their own souls!" Whenever men sin, they sin *against themselves*. Society cannot exist without laws: and laws are nothing without penalties. Connivance at the guilty would be cruelty to the innocent. In every well-ordered government crimes are punished. And will they, can they escape in the empire of a Being, holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works! What would you think of a magistrate, who bore the sword in vain! and who was not a terror to evil doers as well as a praise to them that do well! What would you think of him, if, when you brought before him the incendiary of your house, or the murderer of your child, he should say, This does not regard me —and smile, and say—Go in peace! We dislike the word vindictive justice—there seems something malignant in it: but substitute in the room of it, the vindicatory, or punitive justice of God, and we contend that this is essential to the excellency of his character; and that you could not esteem, or even love him, without it. What regard could you have for a being, who equally respected lies and truth! cruelty and kindness! a Nero and a Howard! We readily own, that when anger and wrath are ascribed to God in the Scriptures, they do not imply any thing in him like passion in us: but only principle. But principle they *do* establish: and this principle is the soul of order; adherence to rectitude; determination to punish.

And we may see this in his threatenings. For his wrath is *revealed* from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. If this book be true, the wicked shall not stand in his sight. He hateth all workers of iniquity.

He has also confirmed and exemplified it in his conduct. Look to heaven, and see the angels sinning against themselves, and cast down to hell. See Adam and Eve driven from the garden of Eden. See the Flood carrying away the world of the ungodly. See the inhabitants of the Plain. And Pharaoh. And the nations of Canaan. And the Jews, though so peculiarly indulged of God. Yea, he even visits the transgressions of good men with a rod: and though he *forgives* their iniquities, he takes vengeance on their inventions. See Moses and Aaron forbidden to enter the Land of Promise: and Eli and David so awfully judged in this life. And if these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? And if the righteous are recompensed in the earth, how much more the sinner and the ungodly!

It would be easy to trace the injury of sin with regard to every thing of which the welfare of the sinner is compounded. His connexions ought to be dear to him. But how does he sin against these! How does the wicked child rend the heart of his parents, and bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave! How does the husband, instead of providing for those of his own house, by his vices, reduce the wife he ought to love even as himself, to indigence and wretchedness; and her hapless babes along with her! What a blessing is health. But how does he sin against this! By intemperance and sensuality, he is made to possess the iniquities of his youth, which lie down with him in the dust. Envy is the rottenness of the bones. So are hatred and malice. And so are all those corroding anxieties and fears which they must feel who have no confidence in God, or hope of heaven. Reputation is desirable, as it enables us to live in the esteem of others; and valuable as it is, an instrument of usefulness: a good name, says Wisdom itself, is better than great riches. But who regards the sinner? Who confides in him? What is his friendship? or his promise? The name of the wicked shall rot. A wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame. We must be measured, and weighed, by our souls. The mind is the standard of the man. This is the seat of happiness or misery. But he that sinneth against me, says God, wrongeth his own soul. Wrongs it of peace—for there is no peace to the wicked. Wrongs it of liberty and pleasure—for he is in the *gall* of bitterness, and in the *bond* of iniquity. Wrongs it of safety—for the wrath of God abideth on him: he is condemned already.

But let not these sinners suffer in vain. They are our martyrs. They die and perish for us. Their loss should be our gain; and their destruction our salvation.

The first advantage we may derive from an observation of the sins and sufferings of others, is the confirmation of our faith. And nothing can tend more to establish our belief in the truth of the Scripture, than to take its declarations and decisions, and compare them with the documents of men's lives. The Bible tells us that the way of transgressors is hard. That they proceed from evil to evil. That a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. That the companion of fools shall be destroyed. That the love of money is the root of all evil. And who has not seen this, as well as read it?

Another benefit, is gratitude. When we see the wicked, we see what *we* should have been, but for preventing and distinguishing grace. Who made me to differ? Have I a

heart of flesh, while they are insensible? Am I light in the Lord, while they are darkness? Am I walking in the way everlasting, while destruction and misery is in their paths? By the grace of God, I am what I am.

The observation should also awaken and excite zeal. Surely none so much need our compassion, as those who are destroying themselves for ever. We talk of doing good. What advantage can we procure a fellow-creature like that godliness, which is profitable unto all things? What enemy can we rescue him from, like his lusts and vices? If we convert a sinner from the error of his way, we save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

It should also serve to wean us from the present world. What a bedlam it is! What a sink of corruption too! What righteous soul is not daily, hourly, vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly? Thus the ear, the eye, the heart, is constantly sickened. We behold the transgressors, and are grieved. Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of way-faring men! Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest—with the spirits of just men made perfect—dwelling in love, and dwelling in God!

Finally. Let us fetch from it warnings. When Daniel, addressing Belshazzar, reminded him of his father's pride and destruction, he aggravates his guilt, by saying, "Thou knewest all this." When the Apostle mentions "the sins and plagues that Israel knew," he says, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three-and-twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

And surely, O my soul, if the sins of others may be rendered thus profitable, I ought to be concerned to gain something from my own. Let me derive wisdom from my follies; strength from my weakness; and standing from my very falls. Let me see more of my depravity; and put on humbleness of mind; and apply to the blood of sprinkling; and never more trust in my own heart, but be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus: and be sober and vigilant; and—till I am beyond the reach of evil, pray, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

JUNE 14.

"Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?"—John xiv. 9.

He had been with Philip and his fellow-disciples corporeally; for the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, and they beheld his glory. But his bodily presence was confined to Judea, and few knew him after the flesh. And soon he was known so no more: for he was received up into heaven. But it is remarkable, that while on earth, he evinced that his efficiency was not dependent on his bodily presence: for he performed cures at a distance, as we see in the case of the nobleman's son, and the centurion's servant, who were healed by no application, but simply by his volition; as if to encourage the belief, that when removed hence, he could still operate in our world.

And if his word is to be relied upon, he is with his people now. What was his promise to his ministers? to his churches! to individuals? "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."—Therefore he has either given promises which he is unable to fulfil, or, though now in heaven, he is with his disciples on earth—with them specially, graciously, spiritually. Effects prove the existence of the cause. The operation of the workman shows his presence. And that "*his* Name is near, his wondrous works declare." He has done enough *in* the Christian, to demonstrate that he is *with* him—and he hath said, I will never *leave* thee, nor *forsake* thee.

Yet he says to Philip—"Hast thou not known me?" Philip was not entirely ignorant of him. But he knew him not sufficiently; he knew him not comparatively; he knew him not, considering how he might have known him. And is not this the case with us! Some have very little knowledge of any kind. They never guide even the common affairs of this life with discretion. They seem incapable of improvement. Even suffering does not teach them wisdom. "Experience," says Franklin, "is a dear school? yet fools will learn in no other." And *they* do not learn even in this. Yet the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. We live in a land of vision; we have Sabbaths and Bibles, and religious ordinances and teachers. Yet as to a knowledge of the peculiar truths of the Gospel, and

the reality of Christian experience, numbers are as ignorant as heathens: "The light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not." Must we go on? What do many Christians, real Christians, who have long had the great Teacher with them—what do even they know? What do they know of their own interest in him? Are they not yet unable to determine what their spiritual condition is, and to say, with Thomas, *My* Lord and *my* God?—How little do they know of his salvation! How little of the glories of his person! How little of the nature of his dispensations towards them: so that they—are confounded with the fresh discoveries they make of the evils of their own hearts—perplexed with their afflictions—desponding if difficulties multiply, and they see no means or way of escape—and ready to conclude that he has shut out their prayers, because he does not immediately and sensibly answer them: and all this from their knowing so little of the *manner* in which he deals with his people.

Yet the defectiveness of their knowledge is very censurable, especially after *long* intimacy with him. Hence the Apostle reproaches the Hebrews: "When for the time ye ought to have been teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." Hence our Lord said to his disciples on another occasion; "Are ye also yet without understanding?" And here again he says; "Have I been *so long* time with you, and *yet* hast thou not known me, Philip?" He had scarcely been three years with them then; and he had very gradually developed himself, and kept back many things for a future communication. Yet it was a long period, considering its importance and privileges. And always having access to him, with their inquiries; and hearing his discourses; and witnessing all his conduct; they ought to have gained much more than they did. But they were slow of heart, and made very little progress, as we see by their various mistakes and embarrassments. Yet what right have we to cast a stone at them? How few, how poor, how wretched have been our attainments! And yet he has been much longer with many of us—ten—twenty—forty years—years, too, abounding with every assistance. Four things ought to make us blush at the thought of this.

First. The necessity and value of the knowledge that we have made so little proficiency in. How much depends upon it—our usefulness—our preservation from error—our peace and comfort—and our progress in the divine life. For though we may grow in knowledge without growing in grace, we cannot grow in grace without growing in knowledge. Religion does not act upon us mechanically, but morally; that is, through the influence of just views and motives.

Secondly. Some have made far greater advancement in much less time, and with very inferior advantages. They set out long after us; but they soon passed us on the road. They have had very little pious intercourse, and have seldom heard a Gospel sermon. Yet when we converse with them; and observe them in the relations, duties, and trials of life; how much below them must we feel!

Thirdly. Our obligations and responsibility rise with our means and opportunities. What an advantage are pious relations! What a privilege is a Gospel ministry! What a precious talent is time! Where is conscience, while we look at our slender improvement of all these? Where much is given, much will be required.

Lastly. Our unprofitableness is the subject of divine disappointment and complaint. "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" The thought of displeasing and dishonouring him is nothing to some people. But shall *we* provoke, and grieve, his Holy Spirit? Can we who love him and know what he has done for us—can we be insensible to the Saviour's decision—"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples?"

What remains—but that we admire and adore the patience of him who still bears with us, though we have so often constrained him to ask, "How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"—And let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us guard against indecision and sloth. Let us be diligent in the use of all the means of religious improvement. Let us not cease to pray that we may be "filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

"Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning. And he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

JUNE 15.

"*When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.*"—Deut. xxxii. 8.

This is an important and interesting communication. It supplies us with two facts.

First. That *God* originally divided the nations their inheritance. When, after the Deluge, he gave the new earth to the children of men, he did not throw it in among them, so to speak, for a kind of scramble, that

each might seize what he could: but he assigned them their several portions, that the discontented might not invade the peaceful, nor the mighty prey upon the weak. God permits what he does not approve: but nothing can be more contrary to his design and pleasure, than for powerful states to invade and incorporate little ones. And the crime generally punishes itself. Such unjust and forced accessions add nothing to the safety, strength, or happiness of the acquirers; but become sources of uneasiness, corruption, and revolt—so difficult is it to suppress old attachments, and patriotical instincts that are almost equal to the force of Nature. Paul justifies the sentiment of Moses: "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us."

Secondly. In the arrangement of the limits and conditions of mankind, he had an especial reference to the future commonwealth of Israel. For they were by far the most important detachment of the human race. They were the Lord's portion, and the lot of his inheritance. They were the depositaries of revealed religion; the heirs of the righteousness which is by faith. To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: theirs were the fathers; and of them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. We cannot trace this fact perfectly, for want of more materials; and we know not all the purposes of God in making and keeping the Jews a peculiar body—otherwise we should clearly see how all the dispensations of God corresponded to their privileged destination.

One thing is to be observed. They were not intended to *engross* the Divine favour, but to be the mediums and diffusers of it. They were not only to be blessed, but to be blessings. Hence their being placed in the midst of the earth, that from them knowledge might be derived, and proselytes to revealed religion might be made; and that in the fulness of time, out of Zion might go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and that the great Supper, as our Lord calls it, and which was designed for the whole family of Adam, might be spread in the midst of the earth, and be accessible to all.

While we here see that there is nothing like chance in the government of the world, there is what may be called a peculiar providence in particular instances. And here we cannot help thinking of our own country. No country on earth bears such a comparison with Judea, in privilege and design, as this favoured land. Its appropriation and appointment will account for its preservation, and emerging from difficulties which seemed likely to swallow it up. And when we consider what it is, and what it more than promises to be, we can find reason for its insular situation; its government, laws, and commerce; its talent, and learning, and influence, and dominion. We are a sinful people: but as "the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it; so, says God, will I do, for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all." We cannot approve of every thing we have done, especially in the West and East Indies: but we cannot be ignorant that God is overruling it for good; and has ends in view far beyond slaveholders, and mercantile companies, and heroes, and statesmen. We have fought, and we have conquered: but the Negro is instructed; and the captive is made free indeed; and openings are made and occupied for the spread of the Gospel.

The economies of Heaven on earth have always been regulated by one end—the cause of the Messiah: and could we view things as God does, we should perceive how all the revolutions of the world; the changes of empire; the successes or defeats of haughty worms; have affected this cause—immediately or—remotely—in a way—of achievement or—preparation—of purification or—increase—of solidity or—diffusion: and that all things are going on, not only consistently with it, but conducively to it. For, says the Ruler over all, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in rightcousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

And, oh! Christian, there is a special providence over thee. The hairs of thy head are all numbered. One thing regulates all that befalls thee; all the dark as well as the clear, all the painful as well as the cheerful—thy spiritual—thy everlasting welfare. "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them that are the called according to his purpose."

JUNE 16.

"*Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes.*"
Psalm xxvi. 3.

And it will be well to follow David; and to keep the lovingkindness of God before our eyes also. This should be done four ways.

First. As a subject of contemplation. The mind will be active; and it is our wisdom to regulate and sanctify our thoughts. Isaac went out into the field at eventide to meditate; and we may infer the nature of his reflections from his character. David said, My meditation of Him shall be sweet. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! People complain of the

ifficulty they feel in fixing their minds: but the duty would become easier by use—and surely they can never be at a loss for a theme. Let them take his lovingkindness and set it before their eyes. Let them observe it as it appears in the promises of his word; in the history of his Church; in their own experience. Let them pass from the instances of his lovingkindness to the qualities of it. Let them dwell upon its carliness; and fulness; and extensiveness; and seasonableness; and constancy—"Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

Secondly. As the source of encouragement. How often shall we need this! We shall feel our want of it under a sense of our guilt, and unworthiness, and continued imperfections: and nothing short of the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us by Christ Jesus, will be able to relieve us. But this *will* relieve us; and *effectually* succour us. It will give us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace; and boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. And it will do all this without reconciling us to our sins, or even our infirmities—yea, it will make us lament our deficiencies the more, and grieve that we serve him so little, who loves us so much. We shall want it in our afflictions. And who can hope to escape these in a vale of tears? Now nothing is so desirable in our sufferings as to see, not only the *hand*, but the *kindness* of God in them. For often they look like the effects of his wrath, and we tremble under them, and cry, "Do not condemn me. I could bear these trials if I thought they were only the strokes of a Father's rod, and knew they were sent in love." And they *are* sent in love. They are only the strokes of a Father's rod, laid hold of with reluctance, and laid aside with pleasure.

Thirdly. As an excitement to praise. It is afflicting to think how little the lovingkindness of God is acknowledged by those who are constantly partaking of it. How lamentable, says Leighton, is it, that a world so full of God's mercy should be so empty of his glory. Oh! says David, again and again, Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Were there not ten lepers cleansed? But where are the nine? Did even Hezekiah render according to the benefits done him? And are we better than they? And whence is it that we feel so little the obligations we are under to the God of our mercies! Because the mercies of God are so little remarked and remembered by us. Nothing can impress us when it is out of our minds and thoughts. Therefore, says David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." At the moment when God appears for us, we are sensible of his goodness, and speak well of his Name: but, like the Jews, we soon forget his works, and the wonders which he has shown us. We inscribe our afflictions upon a rock, and the characters remain: we write our mercies in the sand of the seashore, and the first wave of trouble washes them out.

Lastly. We should keep his lovingkindness before our eyes as an example for imitation. The Scripture calls upon us to be followers of God as dear children. And in what are we to resemble him? His moral, and not his natural perfections. We may wish to resemble him in power and independence; and to be as gods, knowing good and evil. But we are to be concerned to reverence Him, not as the greatest, but the best of beings—to be faithful as he is faithful—to be holy as he is holy—to be patient, and forgiving, and kind, like himself. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful.

You would do well to keep in view some of your fellow-creatures, who feel that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Think of a Howard, a Thornton, a Reynolds. But in *Him* the fatherless findeth mercy. God is love. We cannot equal him. But it is our happiness to resemble. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

JUNE 17.

'*The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.*"—Lam. iv. 20.

Some commentators suppose that these words are intended to apply to the Saviour—We see no ground for this conclusion. Others imagine that there may be a reference to him under the case of Zedekiah. However this may be, the passage may be used—not to prove any doctrine, but to remind us of several things pertaining to the Lord Jesus, and fully established in the Scriptures of Truth.

Such as his office—"The anointed of the Lord:" the very meaning of the word Messiah in the Old Testament, and of Christ in

the New. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed at their consecration. He was all these. And therefore he is said to be anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. Here the term imports majesty : and he is the King of glory; the King of saints; the King of nations—"With my holy oil have I anointed him."

Such is the estimation in which he is holden by his subjects—"The breath of our nostrils." He is not so regarded by others. The world knew him not. The Jews received him not. He is now, as to the multitude, despised and rejected of men. This was the case once with his own people. They acknowledged it; and look back with shame and sorrow upon a period—and with some of them it was a long period, during which he had no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that they should desire him. But he has been revealed in them. And now he appears fairer than the children of men, and altogether lovely. Faith makes him precious. He is their righteousness and strength; their glory and joy; all their salvation and all their desire. We may be excessive in our attachment to a creature; but we can never think too highly of him. It was idolatry in these Jews to call their prince the breath of their nostrils; but Jesus is really and absolutely so to us. How dear! How important! How indispensable!

> "This flesh of mine might learn as soon
> To live, yet part with all my blood;
> To breathe when vital air is gone,
> Or thrive and grow without my food."

—Such is their expectation from him—"Of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen." The Israelites were literally among the heathen, surrounded as they were with the Gentile nations. This was also the case with the first Christians. Yea, they were not only encompassed by them, but intermixed with them. In one house dwelt an idolater; in the next, a worshipper of God. A Pagan and a Christian laboured together in the same field, or the same manufactory. We should not undervalue the outward advantages of Christianity. How much more privileged are we, than our missionary brethren!—They live under his shadow—but it is among the heathen! While we have our Sabbaths, and temples, and preachers, and our fellow-Christians, with whom we take sweet counsel together. Though there are no heathens among us, nominally, and as to dispensation, yet there are some who know nothing doctrinally; and many who know nothing spiritually: many who are without God in the world, and who hate and oppose, as far as they are allowed, the religion we experience. And how often is a righteous soul vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly, and constrained to sigh, "Wo is me, that I dwell in Mesech!"—But whatever be the disadvantages of our condition, there is a shadow—and *his* shadow—under which we can *live!* A shadow from the heat—not the shadow of a summer-cloud only; but of a great rock in a weary land: the shadow of a tree yielding, not only shade, but fruit, according to the acknowledgment of the Church—"I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." So it is said, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return: they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." His shadow means protection, and all the blessings of his empire. The reign of some rulers is like the shadow of a vulture over the bird of prey; or as a hurricane over the flooded meadow, and the stripped forest. But let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

—Such is his apprehension and suffering—"He was taken in their pits." They watched him, and persecuted him through life. At length he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies: and they insulted him, and crucified him, and laid him in the grave—Then his disciples said, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel"—"The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen."

—But here correspondence becomes contrast. No type, no image, no illustration, can do justice to him: and when examined, it will always be found to teach more by unlikeliness, than by conformity. Zedekiah's subjects had their hopes disappointed and destroyed *by his* arrest; and when carried away, and imprisoned at Babylon, he could no longer defend or comfort them. But Jesus is our hope, notwithstanding his apprehension and death—yea, and in consequence of it. He is made perfect through sufferings. And thus it is that he brings many sons unto glory. When he fell into the hands of his enemies, they thought they had completely succeeded. But their triumph was short. He fell; but in dying he overcame. And then was the judgment of this world, and then was the prince of this world cast out. We therefore glory in his Cross; there he becomes the author of eternal salvation. He died for us, and rose again; and because he lives, we shall live also.

—Let us, then, *live* under his shadow; securely live; nobly live; joyfully live—not only having life, but having it more abundantly.

—And let us invite others to come, and share with us. "In that day shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine, and under the fig-tree."

JUNE 18.

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers." Acts xviii. 1—3.

Aquila and Priscilla were persons of great religious excellence. They are often mentioned with commendation in the Epistles, as well as in the Acts of the Apostles—especially where Paul says to the Romans, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." They were born in Pontus—then they resided in Italy—and were now in business at Corinth. Hither they had been driven by an Imperial decree; and probably thought hard of the measure that banished them. But in consequence of this trial they became acquainted with Paul, and had him for their guest, their friend, and companion. And what a companion must a man of his talents and grace have been! And what an advantage must they have derived from his morning and evening devotions! and his example! and his constant conversation! Surely they would acknowledge, It is good for us that we have been afflicted.

The lives of some have been very changeable: and in their removals, contrary to a disposition to enjoy a fixed and permanent dwelling, they have been ready to murmur and complain. But nothing occurs by chance; and all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to those that fear him. Let such remember, that they know not what designs God has to accomplish by events of this nature, either with regard to themselves or with regard to their connexions. Let them also reflect, that this is not their rest; and view every present residence as

"Preliminary to the last retreat."

In proportion as we look after a better country, and realize it as our own, all earthly situations will be alike indifferent to us—yea, we shall find each of them none other than the house of God and the gate of Heaven.

Paul not only lodged with them, but wrought: for they were of the same occupation with himself. For though he had been educated at the feet of Gamaliel, he had been bred to the craft of tentmaking. The Jews, whatever was their condition in life, were accustomed to give their sons a calling: wisely considering it a prevention of idleness, a security from temptation, and a resource in accidental indigence. Hence, of their doctors, one was surnamed Rabbi, the shoemaker; another, Rabbi, the baker; another, Rabbi, the carpenter. Bicaut says, the Grand Seignior, to whom he was ambassador, was taught to make wooden spoons. Is this degrading? Seneca says, he would rather be sick, and confined to his bed, than be unemployed. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden to dress and to keep it. And our Saviour declined not working at his supposed father's business. Paul, the chief of the Apostles, was not ashamed of labour. But, as a man of taste and learning, he must have been fond of reading; and he desired Timothy to bring him his books and parchments. It seems, therefore, strange that his friends should not have indulged him with leisure and entire freedom for his office also; by exempting him from manual toil. The workman is worthy of his hire: and this he always claimed as a *right*, contending that they who preached the Gospel should live of the Gospel: adding, also, that no man who warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.

But a right is sometimes to be given up: and there is no general rule but allows of exceptions. Priscilla and Aquila were not rich, and would lament their inability to do more for their illustrious guest. And he had an independence of mind, and seeing these worthy people themselves labouring to gain a livelihood, he would not be burdensome, but pay for his accommodations. And they are mean souls who will endure to be supported by the alms, and especially by the industry of others, when their own hands are sufficient for them—They who will not work should not eat. In a word, Paul knew the infancy of the cause, and was acquainted with all the circumstances of the case; and acted, we may be assured, with wisdom and prudence. Yet his conduct displayed the noblest self-denial and zeal.

There are two places in which he refers to his working. The first shows the degree in which he toiled, often—after teaching, sitting up late at night—"Ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for we laboured *night* and day, because we would not be chargeable unto you." The second tells us that his aim was not only to support himself, but to be able to succour others—"Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to *them* that were with me." What a soul had this man! And how well could he add—"I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

JUNE 19

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."—2 Tim. ii. 1.

We may have this grace, and not be strong in it. The reality is one thing; the degree is another. We read of weak faith, as well as of strong faith. There are lambs in our Shepherd's fold, as well as sheep: and in our Father's house there are little children, as well as young men. But while there is in religion an infancy which is natural and lovely; there is also another which is unlooked for and offensive—it is the effect of relapse. It is not of the beginning of the Divine life, but of an after period, the Apostle speaks, when, reproving the Hebrews, he says, "Ye are *become* such as have need of milk, and not of strong drink." We must not despise the day of small things. The Saviour himself does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; but he is concerned to bring forth judgment unto victory. And while the feebleminded are to be comforted, the slothful are to be stimulated; and all are to be kept from "settling upon their lees."

Every thing shows how necessary it is to be *strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Your dangers require it—These are to be found in all the relations, offices, conditions, and circumstances of life. Your passions are not wholly mortified—There is the sin that yet dwelleth in you—The world lieth in wickedness, and you are passing through it—Your adversary, the Devil, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. How much depends upon one instance of falling! And did not Abraham equivocate? Did not Moses speak unadvisedly? Did not Peter deny his Lord? And what says all this to us? Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Your duties require it. You have a family; and with your house you are to serve the Lord. You have a calling; and in this you are to abide with God. You have the exercises of devotion, in which you are to worship God in spirit and in truth. You have to walk by faith, and not by sight. You are to have your conversation in heaven, while every thing conspires to keep you down to earth.

Your usefulness requires it. You are not to live to yourselves, but to him that died for you, and rose again. You are to look not on your own things, but also on the things of others. You are to walk in wisdom towards them that are without, and endeavour to win souls. You are to do good, as you have opportunity, unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith.

Your trials require it. Who but must reckon upon these in a world like this? And if you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. To glorify God in the fires, and to recommend religion by its supports and comforts, when every thing else fails, demands no small share of grace.

Your consolations require it. Consolations are not only delightful, but they are even of practical importance in religion. They enlarge the heart, and enliven zeal, and embolden courage, and wean from the world—And you read of a peace that passeth all understanding! and a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory! Yet, what do some of you know of these? More grace would bring more evidence; and raise you more above your fears and depressions. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

Death requires it. Other events may, but this must occur. It is a melancholy day to those that have no God; and a very serious one to those who have. To think of it—to meet it—with triumph—or even with confidence—will not this call for more grace than you now possess? And what is the language of all these demands? Despond? No—but be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Without him you can do nothing: but through his strengthening of you, you can do all things.

Rest not, therefore, in any present attainment. Like Paul, forget the things that are behind, and reach forth unto those that are before. It is to be lamented that we are easily dissatisfied where we ought to be content; and content where we ought to be dissatisfied. In temporal matters we should have our conversation without covetousness, and be content with such things as we have. But here, alas! we are avariciously anxious. And though three feet are enough for us in the cradle, and seven in the grave, nothing will hardly satisfy us between. But in *spiritual* things, with what trifling acquisitions are we contented! Yet here it is even our *duty* to be covetous, to be ambitious! And as before us lies an infinite fulness, and we are not straitened in our resources, let us not be straitened in our desires and expectations: let us ask, and receive, that our joy may be full.

JUNE 20.

"Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy Name."—Psalm lxi. 5.

So then, they that fear God have an heritage. All of them have not an heritage in the world. And they need not be ashamed to own it: they have the honour of conformity to their Lord and Saviour, who had not where to lay his head. And though they have nothing, they yet possess all things—"I know thy poverty; but thou art rich." Indeed, even as to temporal good, they are above others. He blesses their bread and their water; and bread and water, with the favour

of God, are dainties. And a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. It is not only sweeter, but safer, and will go further. The grace of God will make a little go a great way. This we have often seen; and we should have been amazed how some individuals, with their very slender means, could make a decent appearance, and pay their way, and have a trifle to give to him that needeth—did we not know that the secret of the Lord was upon their tabernacle. Godliness, also, with contentment, is great gain. Contentment is a kind of self-sufficiency. It does not allow us to want what Providence denies. And who, whatever be his affluence, can be more than content? A man is satisfied with much less in a journey, than he has at home. Now regeneration makes a man a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth: and then reason, as well as faith, says to him,

> "Turn, pilgrim, turn; thy cares forego;
> All earth-born cares are wrong:
> Man wants but little here below;
> Nor wants that little long."

But as to spiritual good, they may well say, The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. For the Lord is the portion of their inheritance, and of their cup. His testimonies are their heritage for ever; and they find them the rejoicing of their hearts. All the exceeding great and precious promises are theirs. And theirs is the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. Compared with this, what was the heritage of a Jew in Canaan? of Adam in Paradise? What is the heritage of a crowned worldling? of an angel in glory? Yet this is as true as it is wonderful—"This is the heritage of the servants of God; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

For this heritage is not obtained by force, nor by purchase, nor by desert; but by bounty and grace—It is "given."

And we may know that we possess it. David speaks without any hesitation—Thou *hast* given *me* the heritage of those that fear thy Name.

Oh that I could read my title clear. Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion. I long to be able to praise thee as the health of my countenance, and my God. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. And show me a token for good.

Above all, as—whatever they may doubt or fear—blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled; enable me—if I cannot say with confidence, Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy Name; enable me to pray, with supreme desire, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance"

JUNE 21.

"*Neither give place to the Devil.*"
Eph. iv. 27.

If this admonition be connected with the words immediately preceding—"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath;" the Apostle intimates that sinful passion arises from the influence of the Devil; and that, when it prevails, we give up ourselves to his power. And can there be a truer specimen of hell than a man in a state of fury and revenge?

But there is nothing in the case that requires us to confine the address to the repulsion of wrath. The truth is, that Satan has access to us, and in various ways is always endeavouring to encroach upon us; and it must be our object to repel him. The image is familiar and striking. If an enemy was trying to enter your field, your garden, or your house, you would withstand him: for you would see, that as you yielded, he advanced. In every successful temptation, Satan gains upon us, and takes a position which we ought to have kept.

With the philosophy of this subject we have nothing to do, but only with the fact itself. The sacred writers as much support the doctrine of diabolical agency as of divine. They make use of the same terms and phrases in the one case as in the other. Is God said to open the eyes of our understanding? Satan is said to blind the minds of them that believe not. Is God said to work in us to will and to do? Satan is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Are Christians filled with the Spirit? Why, says Peter to Ananias, has Satan filled thine heart?

But, while the fact is proved, nothing is said of the mode in which his operations are carried on. We cannot think, however, that it is always done personally and immediately. This would involve an impossibility. If he were *thus* soliciting every individual in every part of the earth at the same time, and his work *is* always going on, he must be omnipresent and omniscient. But he is the god of this world; and having under him all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; and having all the errors and the wickedness which *he* has introduced into our region to make use of; and such a depraved nature as ours to work upon—he has power enough to employ *mediately* for all his purposes. The bird need not be afraid of the fowler if he keeps away from his gun and his snare; for he is not in much danger from his fingers. How is the fish taken? The angler does not wade into the water, and seize it in his hand. He does not

even *see* his prey: but he reaches it, and secures it, by a baited hook at the end of his line, and his rod. Yet *he* catches the fish; and would do the same if his instrument was a mile long.

There are many reasons why we should not give place to the Devil. One is, because his designs are always bad. He may transform himself into an angel of light. And he may endeavour to introduce his evils and mischiefs under specious names: representing covetousness as laying up for children; and pride as dignity; and revenge as a becoming spirit; and trimming in religion as prudence; and conformity to the world as winning others —Thus we are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. But we ought not to be ignorant of Satan's devices. We read of his depths and his wiles. And God in his word tears off all his disguises; and shows us at once that his aim is only to ensnare, and enslave, and rob, and degrade, and wound, and destroy. He, therefore, that yields, wrongeth his own soul, and loves death.

Another is, because the more you give way, the more advantage he has over you. It will always be found much more easy to keep him out than to get him out. When the Moors were admitted into Spain, they staid there for more than six hundred years, in spite of every groan and effort—so much harder is expulsion than exclusion.

Let us therefore avoid parleying with this enemy. He will rise in his demands with every concession. He is not to be treated with, but rejected. Let us guard against beginnings; they increase unto more ungodliness. In this down-hill course we easily proceed from evil to evil. When a person walks out in the morning clean in his apparel, he is cautious how he treads; and the first soil he contracts affects him: but the second offends him less; and the third much less still; till he says, "It matters not now"—and heedlessly dashes on. The youth is not profligate at once: but evil communications corrupt good manners. The first time he complies with a temptation he feels a reluctance, and after the crime is committed, his conscience smites him. But a degree of this is overcome by every subsequent repetition: and the profaner of the Sabbath, and the drunkard, and the sensualist, go boldly on, waxing worse and worse. One sin naturally leads to another; prepares for another; pleads for another; and renders another necessary, either by way of finish or concealment. Thus David, to hide his adultery, commits murder; and then impiously ascribes this to the providence of God—"The sword smiteth all alike!"

Another reason is, because you need not yield. You are not forced. If the Devil compelled you, he would also justify you; for there can be no guilt where there is no liberty. The motives to sin can never be so great as the arguments to forbear. What can weigh for a moment against the authority of an Infinite Being on whom we entirely depend? And what is any indulgence or suffering, compared with endless happiness or misery? Would God have enjoined upon us a thing that is impracticable! And is not his grace sufficient for us! And is it not attainable by us? Is not his promise true; Ask, and it shall be given you? And in the history and experience of his people in all ages, do we not see proof of this? Have not multitudes in the same condition, exposed to the same perils, feeling the same weaknesses and depravity, been more than conquerors?

Finally, resistance is the way to success, and insures it. Hence, says God, resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Can God be mistaken? Can he deceive? And does not every one know that persons slacken in any course or action, in proportion as they want encouragement! For hope is the mainspring of motion. If a beggar be relieved, however slenderly or seldom, he will in extremity repair to the door again—but not if he be positively and invariably refused.

Resist, therefore, *steadfastly;* and show that you are in earnest and determined. For there is a heartless undecided refusal that invites renewed application—or at least does not shut the door entirely against importunity. If Satan cannot look into the heart, he is acquainted with the ways in which it shows itself; and is sure to know whether there is a latent wandering after what is professedly renounced—and so will be led to watch his opportunity, and work his means.

—But the Apostle adds, Resist him steadfastly—*in the faith.* There is no fighting on a quagmire. Faith furnishes the only solid, the only safe ground on which we can contend. Faith clothes us with the whole armour of God. Faith connects us with the Captain of our salvation, without whom we can do nothing; but through whose strengthening of us we can do all things—

> "And Satan trembles when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees."
>
> "A friend and helper so divine
> Doth my weak courage raise:
> He makes the glorious victory mine,
> And his shall be the praise."

JUNE 22.

"*He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria.*"—John iv. 3, 4.

For two reasons. Because Samaria lay in his passage—and because he had in design the conversion of this poor woman. We cannot imagine an event of such magnitude in itself—for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth; and attended with such consequences as this

was—for it involved the salvation also of many of the Samaritans; we cannot imagine that such an event was accidental. Nothing takes place by chance in our most common affairs—and is the conversion of a soul for everlasting blessedness a casualty?

In the recovery of sinners the grace of God is equally necessary and illustrious. By grace are we saved through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship, created in Jesus Christ. And in the conversion Jesus here accomplished, we have an example of this grace. An example of its freeness; of its gentleness; of its power; and of its effects.

Of its *freeness*—in selecting this wicked wretch, in spite of her unworthiness, and without her desire; and making her not only the partaker, but the instrument of his goodness.

Of its *gentleness*—in having recourse to no means of alarm; no violence. No angel appears with a drawn sword; no lightnings flash; no thunder rolls; no threatening terrifies. All is mercy, all is mildness: and he employs circumstances the most natural and suitable, to bring her to conviction, and to induce her to pray.

Of its *power*—in the victory it gained over the corruptions of her heart. If there be a moral disorder that seems incurable; or an evil capable of resisting all reasoning and motive; it is the spirit of impurity. But behold here a new creature! She is not only pardoned, but renewed; and the change wrought at once!

Of its *effects*—She not only believes with the heart, but confesses with the mouth. She is not only enlightened, but inflamed. No sooner has she gained good, than she is concerned to do good. Personal religion becomes social. She cannot for a moment keep from others what she has seen and heard herself—What benevolence! What zeal! What urgency! What fortitude! "The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"—And what success too! For they who speak from experience seldom speak in vain. "Then they went out of the city, and came unto him." Some of these might have accompanied her from curiosity; and some from the mere contagion of example: but not a few were deeply and savingly impressed. "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him, for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So, when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days."

The sight of this had so affected our Saviour as, it would seem, to take away his appetite. He had been hungry, as well as thirsty; and the disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat. But when they returned, and prayed him, saying, Master, eat; he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. And when they said one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat! he said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." What a repast have I had since you left me! A poor, sinful Samaritaness has been here And I have manifested myself to her. And under the impression, she has hastened to inform and invite her neighbours to come and hear me—and has prevailed! "Say not ye, there are four months, and then cometh harvest?" But see the encouragement you have to scatter the seeds of divine truth. "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields"—See the woman and her company coming over yonder plain—"for they are already white unto harvest." Here the success is so immediate, that "the sower and the reaper rejoice *together*." And so it is written—"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seeds; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."

JUNE 23.

"*The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.*" Psalm xxix. 11.

The God of Nature gave David a fine poetical talent. And he employed it like a good man, for his own improvement, and the profit of many. It is well to take advantage of the excitement of any present feeling; and to give it a religious direction; according to the admonition of the Apostle James, Is any afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. David did this; for he was accustomed to put his sentiment into verse, on the occurrence of any interesting or significant event. Many of his psalms took their rise from a trouble or a deliverance he had just experienced. The thirty-first psalm was written at the dedication of his new house. The one hundred and fourth was a spring meditation. The eighth is a night scene. The nineteenth a morning piece. The lines before us were composed in a thunder-storm.

Thunder is one of the sublimest displays of Deity. It generally produces fearfulness and terror. Caligula, the Emperor, at the hearing of it, would creep into any hole or corner. But such a man should reflect, that if God has a mind to kill him, he can do it without raising Nature into a storm—his breath is in his nostrils: he is crushed before the moth—"Thine eye is upon me, and I am not!" And we should do well to think of a more dreadful event. This did Baxter. When a storm came on as he was preaching, and the con-

gregation was obviously disconcerted and dismayed; he paused, and then said, "Men and brethren, we are assembled here to prepare for that hour, when the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."

All greatness is comparative. David therefore naturally addresses "The mighty"—as much as to say to them—You are flattered and feared; but what is the greatest of you before *Him!* Think of the THUNDERER, and adore. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests." Here let the mind review the description; and we shall see how truly and vividly David's imagination marked and pourtrayed the circumstances and effects of the phenomenon—

He then leads us from the uproar of Nature, to the small still voice of *grace*. He retires with us into the sanctuary of God, *there* to testify the glory of his *goodness;* and to calm and cheer us with the assurance of his *providential* empire over all the commotions of life, and his attention to the welfare of his people: "And in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

But this promise, you say, is made to "his people." It is. But be not afraid. Perhaps they will not be found so unlike yourselves as you imagine. It is here implied, that they are *weak* and *distressed*. They want strength and peace. And both these blessings are insured.

Are they by nature without strength? and have they from experience a growing conviction of their inability? Yet with all this sense of weakness, have they trials to endure? duties to perform? a race to run? a warfare to accomplish! As their day, so shall their strength be. His grace is sufficient for them. Let the weak say, I am strong.

Do they need rest and refreshing? The God of peace shall give them peace always by all means. Not worldly peace. He has nowhere absolutely engaged to give this—We say *absolutely;* for if it be good for them, they shall not want it; for they shall want *no* good thing. But there is a peace as far exceeding every other as the soul surpasses the body, and eternity exceeds time—the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and which keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus. This does not depend upon outward things. In the world, says the Saviour, ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace. And hence, as when weak they are strong—so, though sorrowful, they are always rejoicing.

Yet it is only the beginning of it they have here. At death they enter into peace fully. Every enemy is then vanquished. The din of war is heard no more. The dangerous, treacherous, raging, sickly sea is crossed—And then are they glad because they be quiet. So he bringeth them unto their desired haven.

JUNE 24.

"*He departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*" Acts xviii. 7, 8.

THIS was at Corinth. Here he continued a year and six months, assured that the Lord had much people in that city. At first he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews. But upon their opposing and rejecting him, he sought another place to teach in. It was not a building appropriated to public worship. At this time, and long after this, the Christians had no such edifices. They assembled wherever they could find an accommodation. The spot was indeed consecrated—not by a religious ceremony—but by the presence of God and the service itself. The Saviour himself attached no holiness to walls or ground: but said, *Where*—let it be where it will—two or three are gathered together in my Name, *there* am I in the midst of them. He preached not only in the Temple, and in the synagogue; but in the private dwelling, and by the way-side, and in the mountain, and on board a ship. And his Apostles followed his example; and *every* where lifted up holy hands without wrath and doubting.

The house Paul now entered belonged to a worshipper of God whose name was Justus; and it joined hard to the synagogue. The nearer the church, the proverb is, the farther from God. This is founded on the observation, that what men can easily reach

and enjoy, they often neglect. And who are they that come late to the sanctuary? Not those from a distance, but they who live near. Who are absent in bad weather? Those who have carriages, or can procure vehicles; not they who come on foot. Who most frequently excuse their non-attendance? The strong and healthful; not the indisposed and weak. Who sleep during the service? Not the poor and laborious, who have seldom an hour of repose—but the lazy and genteel, who never know what fatigue means.

It was a trial of principle in this man to open his house to Paul. It would create him inconvenience, and trouble, and expense; and it would draw upon him danger and reproach; as it was an open avowal of his adherence to the cause; and he knew that the sect was everywhere spoken against. How many professors of religion, yielding to their selfish and dastardly reasonings, would have refused. They would have said—What will people think of me? What will my relations say? And may not my business suffer? We are never prepared for a course of godliness till we can give up every thing to God, especially our paltry reputation, as our worldly profit. Bunyan, with as much truth as genius, places all the pilgrims under the conduct of Mr. Great-Heart. It is to intimate that we shall need courage every step of the way to the Shining City. Let us consult not with flesh and blood, but only with conviction; and go forth to the Saviour without the camp, bearing his reproach. We shall then, not only retain peace of mind, but please Him whose lovingkindness is better than life. Did Obed-edom repent of taking in the ark? The Lord blessed his house, and all that pertained to him. Who was ever a loser by any thing he did for the cause of God? Who *can* be a loser while *He* remains true who has said, Them that honour me I will honour. They shall prosper that love Zion?

What Justus did in accommodating Paul, rewarded and dignified him; and it is now told for a memorial of him. How must it have delighted him to see the good that was done under his own roof! There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. But here a man of some rank and influence, Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believes—nor is this all. His *house* too is added to the Lord! Yea, and *many* of the Corinthians, hearing, believe and are baptized!

Yet Paul baptized but few of them. And when he wrote his epistle to these people, he rejoiced in the fact. This has puzzled those who look upon the dispensation of the sacraments, so called, as by far the most honourable and sacred part of the ministerial function. And in all our churches persons are allowed to preach before they are *authorized* to administer what are called divine ordinances. And many reasons have been alleged to account consistently with this—for Paul's conduct in thanking God, that in all the time he staid here, and notwithstanding the multitude of converts, he had only baptized Crispus and Gaius, and the household of Stephanus. But the reason he himself assigns overturns an unscriptural notion and practice—He had devolved upon others the baptism of the new converts, because, says he, Jesus Christ sent me not to baptize—which outward form could be dispensed by others of inferior station and talent: but—which is by far the most important and difficult part of my office—to preach the Gospel.

JUNE 25.

"*The ark of the Covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.*"—Numb. x. 33.

That is, the *Lord* did this. But the Ark was the symbol of his presence, and the seat of his residence; from which, by the cloud, he regulated all their movements. Yet the expression is still metaphorical; and we must not suffer the condescension of his language to injure the glory of his perfections. He feels no perplexity. He never deliberates; never examines; never searches: for "there is nothing that is not manifest in his sight." But as men do this, and must do this, if they would avoid mistakes, and decide and act judiciously; the Lord thus intimates—that his wisdom was concerned in all their journeyings; and that his people may keep their minds in perfect peace, being stayed on him—for, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, he careth for them—they are under his guidance—nothing befalls them by chance. All their removals, and their rests; all their situations, their trials, their comforts; are chosen for them by the only wise God their Saviour, who is always on the *look-out for* them—"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

He not only leads his people in the way that they should go, but is concerned to afford them *repose* as well as direction. Thus, in his promise to Moses he said, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Thus, in the review of his goodness he says, by Jeremiah, "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness, even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest."

Thus here he searched out for them a resting-place—*in* their journey and—*after* it. To the former Moses refers, when he says, "The Lord your God went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch

your tents in"—before they were required to lay them entirely aside. Thus, before they reached Canaan, he led them into many resting-places; in some of which they continued only days; in some, weeks; in some, months; and in a few, even years. It was a fine resting-place when they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees—But this was at the beginning of their journey, and designed to encourage them. They could not look for many stations like this. Each, however, which they successively occupied, was of the Lord's selecting.

We may apply this to the temporal residences of Christians. How moveable have some of them been! But *He* has led them from one situation to another: and it should be satisfying for them to think—that he could find a better resting-place for them than they could have chosen for themselves, for he perfectly knows both the place and the persons. Sometimes the lines fall to them in agreeable scenes; and he kindly exceeds their hopes. In other cases, the abode is less inviting, and even trying. But they must acquiesce, without murmuring or complaining, in their Conductor's disposal—conscious that they are not worthy of the least of all his mercies; and remembering that they are not yet come unto "*the* rest and inheritance which the Lord giveth them."

It will apply also to their spiritual peace and refreshment in their travels. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." There are spiritual resting-places on this side heaven. In their acquaintance with his throne, his house, his day, his word, the covenant of peace—here he affords them the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Here he maketh his flock to rest at noon. Here they lie down in green pastures, and are fed beside the still waters.

But the principal resting-place he sought out for them was at their journey's end. It was Canaan—"In the day I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I *had espied for them*, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands."

Yet there is a better country. And this, Christian, He is looking out for you! Whatever you now enjoy, your repose is imperfect and interrupted. Something, aloud or in whisper, says—Arise, and depart hence; for this is not your rest.

But there remaineth a rest for the people of God. A rest from all toil and temptation. From all sorrow and sin. A rest not only *in* God, but a rest *with* him.

> "O glorious hour! O bless'd abode!
> I shall be near and like my God:
> And flesh and sin no more control
> The sacred pleasures of my soul."

JUNE 26.

"*Upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?*"—John iv. 27.

That is, immediately upon the conversation, and just as he had said unto her, I that speak unto thee am the Messiah.

Thus their return broke off the conference; and the woman was probably grieved to see the disciples so near at hand. Our most interesting interviews in this world are often and soon interrupted. It is sweet to hold converse with our fellow-Christians and with ministers; and it is far sweeter still to hold communion with the Saviour. There are moments in the sanctuary and the closet, when we can say,

> "While such a scene of sacred joy
> Our raptur'd eyes and souls employs,
> Here we could sit, and gaze away
> A long, an everlasting day."

But not only our sinful distractions, but our lawful connexions, and businesses, and cares, invade and disperse our enjoyments; and make us long after a state where these interruptions will be no more. Now we have visions, or at best but visits—then we shall be for ever with the Lord.

The disciples were astonished—and the cause of their marvelling was, that "he talked with the woman." Had they an apprehension that she was a woman of ill character! And, like the Pharisees, did they suppose that it was incompatible with the sanctity of the Messiah to hold any intercourse with persons of infamous reputation? This is not probable. She was a stranger to them. Our Lord indeed knew her; but it was by his divine prerogative; and as yet he had no opportunity to speak of her to his disciples.

It is more likely that their wonder arose from seeing him in close and friendly conversation with a woman of Samaria; for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. The rancour excluded even the common civilities of life. At present the disciples seemed not aware of their Lord's design to extend favour to the Gentiles; and were but little acquainted with the nature of his kingdom—"where there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus."

Again. Women have not always been properly regarded. If they contribute to their own degradation, they must blame themselves. It has often been asked, why the conversation of even wise men, is, with women, always vain and trifling! We do not entirely admit the fact. If, however, there be truth in the supposition, the cause is to be found in females themselves—they must be pleased with such discourse—for men will naturally accommodate themselves to their taste—and it is their interest to do so. Let women rise

and vindicate their sex—many are now doing so: let them show that they consider themselves, and wish to be considered, as rational as well as animal creatures; and as companions as well as playthings and toys, and articles of sense and dress. But at this period the sex were treated, and are so still in the East, as a kind of beings inferior to men. Now the disciples knowing that Jesus never trifled in conversation, but always spoke superiorly and divinely, were amazed to find him discoursing on deep and important subjects with a poor menial woman, judged incapable of understanding them.

The meanness of the persons to whom he manifested himself always scandalized flesh and blood. Have, it was asked, any of the rulers believed on him? But this people, who know not the Law, are cursed. Yet it was his *glory* that the poor had the Gospel preached unto them; and that the common people heard him gladly. When he rejoiced in spirit, he said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. And his Apostle follows in the same strain. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

But we here see the diffidence and submission of the disciples—"Yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?"—Confidence in his greatness and rectitude awed them into silence. Whence we recommend two things. First, let us observe the words of Solomon: "If thou hast *thought* evil, lay thine hand upon thy *mouth*." A good man should make conscience of the state of his mind as well as of his speech: but what we cannot always prevent in thought, we may restrain in expression. Words are worse than thoughts: they add to them; they show more of the dominion of evil; they are more injurious to others; and betray ourselves more into difficulties. In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin. Therefore let us resolve to take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue. David prayed, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

Secondly, as the reverence of the disciples induced them not to question the propriety of our Lord's conduct—though for the present they could not understand it—so should we act towards him. He is not bound to give account of any of his matters; and he often requires us to walk by faith, and not by sight. But we know that his work is perfect; his ways are judgment. Let us never charge him foolishly, but acquiesce in the most mysterious of his dispensations; assured that he has reasons for them which at present satisfy him, and will satisfy us when they are finished and explained. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter.—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints."

JUNE 27.

"*Thou hast been a shadow from the heat.*"
Isaiah xxv. 4.

And what he has been, he is, and will be—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Heat means evil; any evil, every evil, from which it is desirable to be screened. Heaven is a state—and many have reached it—where the sun does not light on them, or any heat. But it is otherwise in this world. Here many things affect the mind, as oppressive heat does the body: and make us pant for deliverance and repose. The wrath of God—a sense of his fiery law in the conscience—the temptations of Satan—the persecutions of wicked and unreasonable men—afflictions, public and private, personal and relative—Here is the heat—

Where is the shadow? Behold me, says the Saviour of sinners, Behold me! Come unto me, and I will give you rest. *This* is the rest, says God, wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.

But what kind of shadow is He? We read in the Scripture—Of the shadow of a cloud—Of the shadow of a tree—Of the shadow of a rock—Of the shadow of a tabernacle from the heat. The shadow of the cloud in harvest is grateful, but transient. The shadow of a tree under which we sit down, is delightful; but it is limited to a small distance: and the rays frequently pierce through the boughs. The shadow of a great rock is dense and cool; but it befriends not on every side, and covers little from the vertical rays. The shadow of a tabernacle, into which we may continually resort, and find not only room, but entertainment, is the most complete and inviting. All these have some truth in their application to him: but none of them can do justice to the subject. He is what they imply, but *more;* and not only more than each of them, but more than *all* of them; and more than all of them *combined;* and more than all of them combined in their *best* estate—and *infinitely* more. He is not only *perfect*, but *divine;* and he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under *the shadow of the Almighty.*

Let me leave, then, other shadows. They are all inadequate to the wants of the soul; and, in some way or other, will be sure to fail me—yea, whatever else I get under for shelter, will not only prove vanity, but vexation of spirit.

But let me make use of this shadow from the heat. He is not far off. He is accessible. He is easy to approach. And it is only by repairing to him that I can enjoy the benefit derivable from him.

And while believing, I rejoice in him with joy unspeakable; let me show my benevolence, by recommending him to others. They also are strangers to repose. They also want rest unto their souls. And he is sufficient to receive, and defend, and succour, and bless all. Oh happy period! when the eyes of men, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the Lord! And when in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed! The Lord hasten it in his time!

JUNE 28.

"*What doest thou here, Elijah?*"
1 Kings xix. 13.

The principle of this question was not ignorance. God well knew how, and why, he came there. But he would know from Elijah himself; and therefore asks him—that, being called upon to account for his conduct, he might be convinced of his folly, and be either speechless, or condemned out of his own mouth. We may view the inquiry three ways.

First, as an instance of God's moral observation of his creatures. His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his doings. Nothing can screen us from this inspection. Elijah was in a wilderness, and alone; he had even left his servant behind him—but the eye of God followed him. And the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. And let us not imagine that he only looks after an extraordinary character, like Elijah. No one is too small and inconsiderable to be disregarded by him. Every human being is not only his creature, but his subject, and responsible to him. The meanest slave is great in the sight of God, as possessed of a soul, and destined for eternity. God has a right to know where we are, and what we are doing; and a much greater right than a father or a master has to know this, with regard to a child or a servant: for we are absolutely his. And he is interested in observing our conduct: interested as a judge, who is to pass sentence upon our actions: interested as a friend and benefactor, who would check us when we are going astray, or recall us when we have wandered. For,

Secondly, we may consider it as a reproof given to a good man. He ought not to have been here, hiding himself from his enemy, and begging that he might die; but should have been engaged in carrying on the cause of God in the reformation he had so nobly begun—He was therefore blameable. God does not cast him off; but he reprehends him. And as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens. And faithful are the wounds of this Friend.

And how does he administer this reproof? He had all the elements under his control: and he showed Elijah what he *could* do: "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave." "And, behold, there came a voice unto him and said"—You cowardly deserter? You ungrateful, rebellious wretch?—No: but—"What doest thou here, Elijah?" And this, "in a small still voice"—a kind of under tone, or whisper, as if no one should hear it beside. Here was no upbraiding; nothing to inflame passion; but a kind and calm appeal to reason. How forcible! and yet tender! It is thus his gentleness makes us great. It is thus he does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. It is thus he calls upon us to be followers of him, as dear children. If a brother be overtaken in a fault, let us not employ the earthquake, the wind, and the fire; but the small still voice. Let us take him aside. Let us tell him his fault between him and us alone. Let us restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. Reproof should never be given in a passion. It is too much, says an old writer, to expect that a sick patient will take physic, not only when it is nauseous, but boiling warm. And we know who has said, "In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Thirdly, as a rule by which we may judge ourselves. Let us suppose that we heard God addressing us, as he did Elijah. How should we answer him? Could we say, I hope I am where Thou wouldst have me to be! and doing what thou wouldst have me to do? He *does* thus inquire. And therefore it behoves us so to act as to be able to give a satisfactory account of our conduct.

Let us apply the question to our troubles. How came we in these difficulties? Have

they befallen us in following after God? Or have we drawn them upon ourselves by our folly and sin?

Let us apply it to our connexions. We are choosing associates—Are we walking with wise men, or are we the companions of fools? We are engaging ourselves for life—Are we marrying in the Lord, or unequally yoking ourselves with unbelievers? "What doest thou *here*, Elijah?"

Let us apply it to our recreations. Are they such as conduce to the health of the body? and accord with purity of mind? or are they amusements and dissipations which, if God should call us to account, would strike our consciences dumb?

Let us apply it to our stations. Are we abiding with God in our own callings? or are we acting out of our proper sphere of duty? How many have injured, if not ruined, their usefulness and comfort, by improper removals, or striking their tent without the cloud!

Let us apply it to our religious services. We ought to have an aim in coming to his house. Happy they who, when they hear the inquiry, What doest thou here, Elijah? can say, Here I am—not from custom or curiosity, but to know what the Lord will speak; and to see his power and his glory as I have seen him in the sanctuary.

And let us remember, that a false answer will be more than useless. We often assign a reason very different from the true one, to an inquiring fellow-creature: and him we may deceive. But God is not mocked.

JUNE 29.

"*Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.*"—Acts xviii. 9, 10.

The Lord is a very present help in trouble; and before his people *express* their apprehensions, he foresees them, and effectually provides against them.

It is obvious Paul was now depressed and discouraged. He had nature in him, as well as grace. The Christian, and even the Apostle, did not destroy the man. He had genius; and not only great sensibility, but a tinge of melancholy is perhaps inseparable from this endowment. He was also the subject of bodily enervation; and was now worn down, not only by constant preaching, but also by working manually, day and night, to support himself and relieve others. In allusion to which, he says, in his Letter to these Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Yea, he was now it would seem, afraid—of men—of suffering persecution—of death. Is this he that said, None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy? Yes. He then spoke sincerely, and according to the frame he was in. But what a change do we feel, if the Lord hides his face; or faith fails; yea, or if there be only a variation in the humours of the body, or the state of the weather!

The Lord therefore removes his fear by the assurance that no man should set upon him to hurt him; for "He was with him; and had much work for him to do"—so that even his destination secured him. And see how faithfully and *remarkably* this was accomplished. For though the place was so abandoned, and he had so many enemies, he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them without any molestation. At length a storm arose, which tried his confidence in the promise. But it issued in the proof that the Saviour in whom he trusted was true and righteous altogether. For all the Jews in the city made a violent insurrection against Paul, and brought him before Gallio the deputy. But he refused to take cognizance of the affair, and drove them from the judgment-seat. Upon which, provoked by his conduct, the Greeks, who had joined the Jews in this assault, fell upon *Sosthenes*, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in sight of the bench—But *Paul*, on whose account the persecution was raised, was suffered to escape uninjured, and continued his labours a considerable time longer, undisturbed, and at length withdrew from the place in peace!

—Is not this enough to prove that nothing is too hard for the Lord! that he can turn the shadow of death into the morning? that our enemies, however numerous and malignant, are all under his control? and cannot move a hair's breadth beyond the length of the chain in which he holds them?

Do we not here see, that if we have his promise we have enough to establish, strengthen, settle us, whatever our difficulties and dangers may be? Heaven and earth may pass away, but his word cannot fail. If a child, even in the dark, feels his father's hand grasping his, and hears him say, I am with thee, fear not; he is calmed and confident. Yea, says David, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee: so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. "Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

JUNE 30.

"*There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.*"—Psalm xlvi. 4.

What can this "river" be, but that blessed

covenant to which David himself repaired in the time of trouble, and extolled beyond every other resource or delight—Although my house be not so with God; yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

And what are "the streams" of this river, but the outgoings and effects of this divine constitution—The blood of Jesus—The influences of the Holy Spirit—The doctrines and promises of the Gospel—The ordinances of religion—And all the means of grace!

There are four ways in which the streams of a river would gladden the citizens. They will all apply in a pre-eminent degree to the case before us.

The first regards *prospect*. Nothing can be more pleasing or interesting to those who relish the simple beauties of nature, than to walk by the side of living streams; to see the fish playing and disappearing; the green weeds waving their long streamers in the water; the reeds bending and recovering themselves again; the rippling of the shallows; and the glassy reflections of the deeps; while the bushes and trees form a quivering shade on the banks. Here is enough to fix the tasteful mind; and to induce the poet to take out his pen, and the painter his pencil. What views have Christians by the side of their streams! How various! How endearing! How impressive the objects which strike and occupy their minds! "My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will rejoice in the Lord."

The second regards *traffic*. It is an unspeakable advantage to a place to be accessible by water, as it renders commerce not only practicable, but easy and extensive. The Humber was the making of Hull. The Thames has rendered London so famous. Were this stream dried up or diverted, how would the mistress of the nations be humbled and reduced! It is owing to their trade, carried on by the means of their rivers, that many cities on the Continent have united themselves to the ends of the earth, and acquired such distinction and wealth. And by these streams Christians obtain riches for the soul and eternity; unsearchable riches; durable riches, with righteousness. It is by these they carry on business with the land that is very far off, the merchandise of which is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

The third regards *fertility*. Imagine a dry and barren land where no water is, and think what happiness would ensue if springs gushed forth from the sands, and meandered through meadows with grass, and reeds, and rushes. Lot chose the plain country, the vale of Sodom, near Jordan, because it was well watered, like the garden of the Lord. Did you never read the words of Balaam in describing the blessedness of Israel? "As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters." What is a tree planted by the rivers of waters, bringing forth fruit in its season, and with never-withering leaves, but a Christian by these streams, growing in the divine life; adorned with the graces of the Spirit; and filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God?

The fourth regards *supply*. What could a city do without this precious, all-important fluid? An enemy, therefore, always endeavours to cut off the water, to compel a place the more suddenly and speedily to surrender. Hence the boast of Rabshakeh; "With the sole of my foot I have dried up all the rivers of the besieged places." This shall never be the case here. Your resources can never fail. Your relief can never be cut off. You have always access to the God of all grace. And how superior are your supplies! How free! How full! How satisfying! "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Are you asking, Who will show us any good? Let the subject supply an answer. Oh, there is—there *is* a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding. Leave the world and enter the Church. There—how unlike creatures, who are all vanity and vexation of spirit—there you will find a Saviour full of grace and truth. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.

O my soul, am I the subject of this happiness? Let me give proof of it. Let me be a witness for God. Let me exemplify his word. Let me convince others that there is—a reality—an excellency—a blessedness in the religion of Jesus that can set the heart at rest, and yield a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The pleasures of which we have been speaking are the pleasures of the way. What will be those of the end!

> "If such the sweetness of the *streams*,
> What must the fountain be,
> Where saints and angels draw their bliss
> Immediately from Thee!"

JULY 1.

"*I beseech thee show me thy glory.*"
Exodus xxxiii. 18.

This prayer was not entirely proper. It

would seem that Moses desired some visible display of Deity, or some kind of representation of Him. And so far it was refused. "He said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

Here we perceive our weakness, even physically considered. How little can we bear! When Daniel only saw an angel he fell into a deep sleep. John, at the sight of Him on whose bosom he had often leaned, fell at his feet as dead. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

We cannot go on well till God has gained our full confidence. Let us never suppose that he denies us any thing from insufficiency to give, or from a grudging disposition. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The very same principle that leads him to give us some things, induces him to withhold others—a regard to our safety and happiness—

> "Good when he gives, supremely good;
> Nor less when he denies:
> E'en crosses, from his sov'reign hand,
> Are blessings in disguise."

Had the Lord yielded all the wish of Moses, Moses would have been destroyed upon the spot. He therefore rejects what was evil in it, but grants what was good—"I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." We are *morally* defective; and our infirmities appear even in our prayers. We know not what to pray for as we ought. What would be the consequence, if all our desires were accomplished? It is our privilege that God is as wise as he is kind. He knows what is really good for us; and answers us not according to our wishes, but our wants; and according to what we ourselves *should only* pray for, if we were alive to our real welfare, and always knew what it includes.

Thus qualified, we cannot do better than to make this prayer our own, and desire God to show us his glory. For he alone can do it efficiently. As the sun can only be seen by his own shining, so God can only be known by his own revealing: in his light we see light. But we have every encouragement we could desire, if we seek the discovery from him. If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. Then shall ye know if ye follow on to know the Lord.

Let us pray, therefore, that he would show us more of his glory. More of it in his works. More of it in his ways. More of it in his dispensations and ordinances. And, above all, more of it in the face of Jesus Christ.

Nor let us ever think we do not stand in need of more. For who expressed this desire? A man who had been indulged already beyond any of his fellow-creatures! Yet, after communications the most deep and extensive, after being inspired to write Scripture; after beholding God in the burning bush; after talking with him as a man talketh with his friend—so far is he from being satisfied, that his soul is drawn forth after more acquaintance with him; and he, even *he*, cries—I beseech thee, show me thy glory. Behold another instance. Paul, after all his intimacies with the Lord Jesus for many years, cries—"That I may know him!" But who is Moses? Who is Paul?—"Which things the angels desire to look into."

Yet some are so perfectly indifferent to the subject of this prayer, that *they* say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Spiritual darkness is the forerunner and pledge of eternal. If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. Because they are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them will show them no favour.

JULY 2.

"*From whence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sung this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The Princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the law giver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah: and from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth.*"—Numb. xxi. 16—19.

Beer was a pleasing station to the Jews; and it is a very instructive one to us. They here came into a dry place; but they neither rebelled nor murmured against God, or his servant Moses.

See, first, How easily the Lord can supply the wants of his people. "Gather the people together, and I will give them water." Not only is every good gift and every perfect gift from above; but all our temporal comforts come from the hand of God. We are not to look for miracles; but we may be assured that his word can be accomplished without them: "For sooner all Nature shall change, than one of God's promises fail." And he has said, "Thy bread shall be given thee; and thy water shall be sure." And what he has pro-

mised, he is able also to perform. Let us not limit the Holy One of Israel. Nothing is too hard for him. He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. Jehovah-jireh! The Lord will provide. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

Secondly. See how want endears our blessings. "Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." We feel unthankful for this precious fluid, because it is so common, and we have never been deprived of it. Had we gone several days in a wilderness without it, how should we have exulted and praised God at the sight of a refreshing supply! It is thus, by their removal or suspension, we are taught the worth of our comforts. How is liberty prized and enjoyed after bondage? and health after sickness? and spring after winter? and morning after night? We become indifferent to the means of grace. By a change of residence, or by accident, or disease, we are deprived of the privileges of the sanctuary. Then we remember these things, and pour out our souls in us: for we had gone with the multitude; we went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and gladness, with a multitude that kept holy day. Oh, says David, when he was faint, Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well that is by the gate of Bethlehem! And were we equally athirst, spiritually, how should we long for the well of salvation, and say,

> "Thou, of life the fountain art:
> Freely let me take of Thee;
> Spring thou up within my heart,
> Rise to all eternity!"

Thirdly. His agency does not exclude or supersede our instrumentality. "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves." God filled it; but they digged it. This was their part. This they could do: and why should God have exempted them from it? He gives the increase; but Paul must plan and Apollos water. He furnishes the wind; but we are to spread the sails. He gives: but we gather. Prayer and diligence, dependence and activity, harmonize in the Scripture, and are only inconsistent in the crudeness of ignorant and foolish men. Paul makes divine influence, not an excuse for the neglect of means, but a motive and encouragement to the use of them—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Fourthly. However pleasing any of our present stations are, we must, if we are the Israel of God, leave them. "And from the Wilderness they went to Mattanah: and from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth." The part they left is called, indeed, the Wilderness; and so it was; but it was good for them to be there. There they had witnessed proofs of the power and goodness of God; and there they had enjoyed a time of refreshing from his presence. But they had compassed the place long enough; and, decamping from this loved scene, had to journey on in the Desert. Here, also, Christians have their indulgences. But these are designed, not to induce them to tarry, but to encourage them to advance. In the midst of their enjoyments a voice cries, Arise ye, and depart hence; for this is not your rest.

These people would have been the more willing to move—because they knew they were moving towards Canaan, a better country, the end and aim of their journey; and—because they were under the direction of God, as their guide, and who would never leave them nor forsake them. So it should be with us.

JULY 3.

"*Faint*—."—Judges viii. 4.

What war is there that has nothing to depress? Nothing to animate? And that does not furnish a diversity of feelings in those who carry it on?

Christians resemble these followers of Gideon and subduers of the Amalekites—Faint, yet pursuing.

Yes—while engaged in this good fight of faith, they may be *faint*. We need not wonder at this, if we consider the enemies they have to vanquish. These are, bodily appetites; filthiness of spirit; a depraved nature; all sin and error; the present evil world; the Devil, and his angels. If we also consider the qualities of their adversaries; their number; their malignity; their power; their policy; their success; for they have cast down many mighty; yea, many strong men have been slain by them. When we think of the heroes, the statesmen, the princes, the philosophers, the divines, and all the myriads they have enslaved and destroyed, who is not ready to tremble, and exclaim, "I shall one day perish!"

There is also the length of the service. It is not for a season only, but for life. We are not allowed to receive any proposals of peace. We cannot enter into a truce—no, not even to bury the dead—Let the dead bury their dead. We are to fight on through summer and winter—by day and night—in every situation and condition. He that endureth to the end, the same only shall be saved. In conversion we throw away the scabbard; in death only we lay down the sword. While

we are here, something is still to be done; something still to be avoided—in company—in solitude—in health—in sickness. And is it nothing to watch in all things! To pray without ceasing! In every thing to give thanks! To be always abounding in the work of the Lord!

There are also occasional difficulties too common to be overlooked. It is easy to suppose a few of them. What marvel if the soldier is faint—when the road is rough and thorny—and the weather is warm and oppressive—and he hungers and thirsts for want of seasonable refreshments and supplies, which are interrupted, if not cut off—and he feels a loss of strength, occasioned by a wound from without, or an indisposition from within? Is this talking parables? There is not a Christian on earth whose religious experience will not easily explain it.

And if this, therefore, be *my* experience—let me remember that there is nothing ominous, nor even peculiar, in it. Every subject of divine grace is well acquainted with the heart's bitterness—and *must* know it—or much of the Scripture could not be applied to him, either in a way of description, or comfort.

—And let me be thankful that to will is present with me, though how to perform that which is good I find not. If I faint, I do not *flee*. Faint—yet PURSUING.

JULY 4.

"—*Yet pursuing.*"—Judges viii. 4.

THE life and experience of the Christian are full of contrasts. He resembles the bush of Moses, which was seen burning, but not consumed. And his language is, Cast down, but not destroyed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as dying, and behold we live. We are now viewing him as a soldier. In our last page, we saw him faint: but we shall now find him, amidst all that is grievous, feeling no disposition to give up. Faint—yet *pursuing*.

And there is much to encourage and animate him. There is something in himself, and which is nothing less than a principle of divine grace. Every thing else will decline when it meets with its proper temptation. Natural and merely moral resources are as the morning cloud, and the early dew, which soon passeth away. But we are confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in us, will perform it. That which is divine is durable, is invincible. That which is born of God, overcometh the world.

There is also much to encourage him in his cause. It is a good warfare. It will bear examination. Conscience entirely approves of it. Angels applaud it. There is, therefore, nothing to make us waver, or hesitate. Every thing in the conflict feeds courage. We *ought* to engage and persevere. It is the cause of truth, of righteousness, of glory—of real glory. It would be more honourable to be foiled in this cause than to conquer in any other.

There is also much in his Leader and Commander. Some chiefs have so attached and inspired their troops, that they would plunge into any enterprise, or follow them into any danger. It was said proverbially at Rome, that it was unbecoming a Roman soldier to fear while Cæsar was alive. It is much more unworthy a Christian soldier to fear while Christ is alive: for, because, says he, I live, ye shall live also. When Antigonus heard some of his troops rather despondingly say, How many are coming against us? he asked—But, my soldiers, how many do you reckon me for? And whenever *we* think of our foes, and the Captain of our salvation, we may truly say, More are they that be with us than they that be with them. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. Who goes before us? Who teaches our hands to war, and our fingers to fight? Who provides for us? Who renews our strength? What limits have his wisdom and power? Did he ever lose an action yet? or a single private in his army?

And let me think of the certainty of the issue. Fear unnerves: but it would make a hero of a coward to assure him in the conflict that he should overcome. This can rarely or never be done in other contentions: for nothing is so doubtful as the result of battle. Prudence, therefore, says, Let not him that putteth on the harness boast himself like him that putteth it off—But the Christian enters the field under peculiar advantage. However trying or lengthened the struggle may be, he fights not uncertainly. Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors!

For what will be the result of success? What do other victors gain? How precarious, how unsatisfying, how poor, how mean the rewards of the world's warriors, compared with the acquisitions of the good soldiers of Jesus Christ! He that overcometh shall inherit all things!

JULY 5.

"*Submit yourselves to God.*"—James iv. 7.

THIS is the great thing. This is the excellency, the essence, the proof of religion. God is our Saviour. Our Lawgiver. Our Disposer. Under each of these characters his people are made willing to submit to him in the day of his power. And nothing but the efficiency of divine grace can influence a man cordially to resign himself to God in all these relations.

We must submit ourselves to God, as the Saviour. Here our concern with him begins. And here it must begin. We are condemned; and the first thing is, to obtain deliverance. We are diseased and dying; and the first thing we want is the physician and the remedy. When, therefore, the Jews asked our Lord, What must we do that we may work the works of God? "This," said he, "is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." When the gaoler asked Paul and Silas what he should do to be saved, they said unto him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." God is a sovereign, at whose mercy we absolutely lie. We have no claims upon him; and it is wonderful that he is disposed to undertake our case at all. But he requires us to submit; and will never allow us to prescribe. He will have the entire management of our case, or he will have nothing to do with it. And it might be supposed that there would be no great difficulty here. But men are not sensible of their condition and danger; and there is much in the nature and manner of this salvation that is not palatable to the pride of the human heart. No court is paid to our reason; but we are required to trust in a plan concerning which we have never been consulted; and even to become fools, that we may be wise. However decent and moral our character has been, we must be content to enter into life in the very same way with the chief of sinners. We must renounce our own righteousness, and plead for acceptance as guilty. We must depend on another for all our strength. We must acknowledge that all we have is from the exceeding riches of his grace; and be crying, to the last, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

But to this every awakened and humbled sinner is brought. And his submission is not the effect of necessity only. It is accompanied with acquiescence and approbation. He sees a consistency and an excellency in it that delight him, while they relieve. And though he knows there is no other way, yet if there were a thousand other ways, he would turn from them all, and say, God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must submit ourselves to Him, as the lawgiver; and be willing to live, not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. He is only the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. We cannot love Him, till we hope in his mercy; nor run in the way of his commandments till we are freed from the load of guilt and terror—a burden too heavy for us to bear. But faith is followed by love; and love, by obedience. We are delivered from the hand of our enemies, says Zacharias, not to be lawless, but to serve Him, who has made us free, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him, all the days of our lives. Our obligations are infinitely increased by redeeming grace and dying love. And every believer feels them, and acknowledges that he is not his own; for he is bought with a price, and bound to glorify God in his body and in his spirit, which are God's. The love of sin, as well as the love of self, is subdued in him: and he gratefully asks, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He finds his yoke easy. He accounts his service to be the truest freedom. He cannot, indeed, do the things which he would; and this is his grief: but he delights in the law of God after the inward man. He would not bring down the Divine commands to his deficiencies; but longs to rise to the level of their perfection. And though he is full of complaints, it is of the servant, and not of the Master—He always speaks well of *his* Name; and recommends him to others.

We must also submit to him, as our Disposer, and be willing that he should choose our inheritance for us. Man naturally loves independence: he wishes to be at his own control; and to have the management of events, both as they affect others, and himself. Many, also, who talk much of the providence of God, are constantly striving with it. Hence they envy the successes of their fellow-creatures; and are discontented and repining when things do not fall out according to their mind. And especially under their trials, they think God deals improperly with them: and so charge him foolishly or unkindly.

This temper is at least dethroned in the Christian: and he is disposed to say, "Here I am; let him do what seemeth him good." I am ignorant, and liable to be imposed upon; but He is all-wise: and by not sparing his own Son for me, he has justified the implicit confidence of my heart. Let him therefore determine the bounds of my habitation, and arrange all the events of my condition. If things are not such as I had wished and reckoned upon, I have no reason to complain. He has a right to do what he will with his own; and he always uses it in a way the most conducive to my welfare. How often have I desired him to undertake and act for me! And when he complies, is it for me to murmur, and dispute; or say unto Him, What doest thou?

JULY 6.

"*What went ye out into the wilderness to see?*" Matt. xi. 7.

THESE are the words of Jesus to the multitude, concerning John, to whose preaching

they had repaired. "There were many of you—and persons of all ranks and conditions—and some from a great distance. What did you think of the preacher? What induced you to attend his ministry? Surely you had some reason for it; some design in it—What was it?"

May we not learn from hence that we should always have an end in view in repairing to the ordinances of religion? and be able to answer the question, *Why* we attend the ministrations of the word!

This becomes us, even as men. Men ought not to act at random; or like the inferior creatures, who are led by blind impulse or instinct, without reflection or motive. They, as the Scripture says, have no understanding, and must be governed and guided by those above them. But God teaches us more than the beasts of the field, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of the air: there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. And wherein is this pre-eminence to appear, but in our acting wisely, and with design?

We rise higher, and say, that without this we cannot please God. There can be nothing religious without design. Intention is essential to moral conduct. And though a good motive cannot sanctify a bad action, a bad motive will always vitiate a good action. The Pharisees fasted, and prayed, and gave alms; but it was to be seen of men: and thus all was corrupted in its principle.

Without an aim in our attendance, we have nothing to pray for before we go; nothing to make the subject bear upon while we are hearing; nothing by which to examine ourselves when we return. How can we decide, whether our meeting together is for the better or the worse? whether we have failed in the opportunity, or succeeded?—Success is the accomplishment of an end; and must be judged of by it.

A man that acts without an end, never acts in earnest. It is the end that stimulates zeal; that sweetens labour; that repays every expense. What would induce a patient to the taking of medicine, or the losing of a limb, but the thought of restoring or preserving health and life?

To finish the argument—the concern itself here should be taken into the account. In common and trivial matters, we may act without motive; but in momentous ones, every kind of deliberation is wisdom. And how important is our attendance on the word of life! It regards God. And the soul. And eternity. Its consequences will remain for ever. It must furnish the most awful part of our future account. *We* forget these exercises; but they are all recorded in the book of God's remembrance. *We* have soon done with the sermon; but the sermon has not done with us, till it has judged us at the last day. What an insult is offered to God, to come before him, and, by an appearance of devotion, to call forth his attention, when, in reality, we have nothing to do with him! What a trifling is it with divine things! And what can be so dangerous as this! It impairs the conscience. It deadens moral sensibility. It renders the means of grace unimpressive, by familiarity. It provokes God to withhold or withdraw the influence that is essential to their success.

But, admitting that we always ought to have an end in view; what OUGHT THAT END TO BE?—Not curiosity and amusement. This was the case with Ezekiel's hearers. They went to his preaching as persons go to a concert.

Not criticism and cavilling. Many are wiser than their teachers. They come to judge, not to learn; and make a man an offender for a word. Many came to our Saviour, to "catch him in his talk."

Not any outward advantage. A man, by his attending the Gospel, may secure himself reputation, business, or friendship. This is trading in divine things. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?

Not the quieting of conscience. Some are at ease in Zion, because they hear the word of truth, though they do it not. But the Apostle tells us, they deceive their own selves: and our Lord calls them fools, because they build upon the sand.

But the end should be—

To obtain the conversion of the soul to God. This is the very design of the ministry itself. And how many have we known, since we attended the word, who have been turned from the error of their ways, into the path of peace! Has faith come to *us* by hearing? Has this efficacy ever been *our* aim—*our* wish—*our* prayer?

It should also be, to gain all needful instruction. This was the case with many who came to hear John. The people, the publicans, and the soldiers, severally said to him—"And what shall we do?" They did not inquire after the duty of others, but after their own. David went to inquire in God's temple; and said, I will hear what God the Lord will speak. The best disposition we can go in, is when we have no partialities, and can sincerely ask, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?—Not shunning to hear all the counsel of God; or counting the preacher our enemy, because he tells us the truth.

It should be, to have divine things re-applied and re-impressed. If we do not want new information, it is desirable to be reminded of forgotten truth, and to have our knowledge reduced to experience and practice. The principle of divine grace cannot be lost. But what changes do believers feel in their frames! How often do their souls cleave

unto the dust! And here they obtain quickening, according to his word. And by waiting upon Him their strength is renewed.

It should be also to aid in upholding the public means of grace for the advantage of others. How adapted to usefulness is the institution of preaching! We may judge what a neighbourhood would be without the ministry of the word, when we see what it is even with it. Here are always to be heard calls to repentance, and proclamations of pardon. Here are always furnished solace to the afflicted, and excitement to the careless.

It is lamentable that so little of this spirit is to be found in the midst of so much hearing as there is in our day. We read of a concourse of people in the Acts, occasioned by the clamour of Demetrius, of whom it is said, "Some cried one thing and some another; for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together." With the exception of the crying out, this is a fair representation of many a religious audience. A few are informed and principled, but the mass have no aim, or an improper one.

In another view it is pleasing to see a place filled with hearers. They are in the way; and God may meet with them. His grace is sovereign and free. Some, who came with no serious design, have been convinced of all, and judged of all; and confessed that God was in the midst of them of a truth. Yet his sovereignty is not our rule, but our resource. What he may do, is one thing; what he will do, is another. He has said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." And though he is sometimes found of them that seek him not, he is always found of them that seek him.

JULY 7.

'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—Rom. vii. 24.

It is commonly supposed that here is a reference to a cruel usage sometimes practised by the tyrants of antiquity; and which is mentioned by Virgil and Cicero, and Valerius Maximus. It consisted in fastening a dead carcass to a living man. Now suppose a dead body bound to your body—its hands to your hands—its face to your face—its lips to your lips. Here is not only a burden, but an offence. You cannot separate yourself from your hated companion—it lies down—and rises up—and walks with you. You cannot breathe without inhaling a kind of pestilence—and "Oh!" you would say, "Oh how slowly the parts corrupt and fall off—Oh how can I longer endure it! When shall I be free? O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" This is very strong. Yet it comes not up to Paul's case. He is speaking of such a wretchedness not without him, but within.

Whatever we may think of this allusion, here is a representation of the sin that dwelleth in us: it is the body of this death, or as it is in the margin, this body of death. It is called *a body*, to intimate the entireness and universality of the evil. Thus we call a code of laws a body of laws; and a system of divinity a body of divinity. And it is a body of —*death*, to mark its malignant effect. Gunpowder is a body of destruction; arsenic is a body of poison—sin is a body of death. It brought death into the world. It has slain all the inhabitants of the earth, and will soon slay us. It has brought upon us spiritual as well as corporeal death. And it produces a deadness even in the souls of believers, and hinders the operation of those vital principles which they have received from above. By this baneful influence the tendencies of the divine life in them, which are so glorious, are chilled and checked: and therefore they are frequently wandering in meditation; and stupid in reading and hearing; and insensible in prayer; and dull even in praise; so that

> "Hosannas languish on their tongues,
> And their devotion dies."

Till, roused by reflection, they cry, My soul cleaveth to the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word.

For there are remains of this evil even in the subjects of divine grace. None of them are free. In many things, says James, we offend all. In all our doings, says the Church, our sins do appear. My tears, says Beveridge, require to be washed in the blood of Christ; and my repentance needs to be repented of. Those who could die for the Saviour have used the most humbling language with regard to themselves. Sometimes, says Bradford, O my God, there seems to be no difference between me and the wicked. My understanding seems as dark as theirs, and my will as perverse as theirs, and my heart as hard as theirs. Yea, says Paul, at the end of so many years of advancement, I have not attained, I am not already perfect. After this, "Who can say, *I* have made my heart clean, *I* am pure from my sin?"

But observe the distress this remaining corruption occasions them. It is their chief burden and grief—O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death! Paul never said any thing like this of any of his sufferings. Yet he was a great sufferer; he suffered the loss of all things; he was once stoned, thrice he suffered shipwreck, he was twice beaten with rods, five times he received forty stripes save one: he was in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft—yet so far from groaning and complaining, he tells us he took pleasure in all this, because it was for Christ's sake. And it is a sad evidence against us, if we are more affected with our calamities

than with our corruptions. We are not required to be Stoics: we may feel our sufferings. But there is something we shall feel more if we are in a right state of mind, namely, an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

The people of the world judge of Christians by their own views and feelings; and because *they* love sin, and would deem the liberty to indulge in it a privilege, they think Christians are disposed to take every advantage for the same purpose. But how shall they who are dead to sin live any longer therein? Sin is their abhorrence; and at the foot of the Cross they have sworn to have indignation against it for ever. They have a new nature; and as *far* as they are sanctified, there is as perfect a contrariety between them and sin, as between darkness and light. Hence the contest within. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these being contrary the one to the other, they cannot do the things that they would. And will not this be painful? If a mechanic longed to excel in his workmanship, and an enemy stood by and marred every thing before he put it out of his hand, would not this be vexatious? Would not a man in a journey of importance, and anxious above all things to speed his way, feel a hinderance, that would impede him for an hour, more than an idler would the loss of a day? He that delights in neatness, will suffer more from a single stain, than another would from wearing a filthy garment. Because their sentiments are evangelical, their enemies seem to think their feelings must be Antinomian: but though this may not be made plain to others, their doctrinal views befriend holiness; and with their mind they serve the law of God; yea, they delight in the law of God after the inward man. The goodness of God leadeth them to repentance. His love is shed abroad in their hearts, and they love him in return. They grieve to think they serve him so defectively, and have still in them so much of that which he infinitely hates. How painful to think that while they repose upon his bosom, they should often pierce it too!

In a word, while many would represent the Christian, if not an enemy to holiness and good works, yet too indifferent to their claims, he is abasing himself before God for the hidden evils of his heart; and is more affected with his sins of infirmity than his revilers are with sins of profligacy and presumption. Thus you may drive a sword through the body of a dead man, and no muscle moves: while the puncture of a thorn will pain a living one all over.

JULY 8

"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified."—1 Cor. vi. 11.

We consider the word "washed," as a general term, comprehending a twofold cleansing; a cleansing from the guilt, and a cleansing from the pollution of sin. It would be easy to show that in Scripture it is used in both these senses. The two added articles, therefore, are explanatory of its meaning here—Ye are washed, that is, ye are sanctified and justified.

What we wish to observe is—that both these are found in the same subjects. Justification and sanctification should be always discriminated; but they must never be disunited. Where they are not distinguished, a religious system cannot be clear; and where they are divided, it can never be safe. Where they are not distinguished, Law and Gospel, free will and free grace, the merit of man and the righteousness of Christ, run into a mass of confusion and disorder. And where they are divided, Pharisaic pride, or Antinomian presumption, will be sure to follow.

Be it remembered, then—That the one regards something done for us; the other, something done in us. The one is a relative, the other a personal change. The one a change in our state, the other in our nature. The one is perfect at once, the other is gradual. The one is derived from the obedience of the Saviour, the other from his Spirit. The one gives us a title to heaven, the other a meetness for it.

But let us not forget their union. It is supposed that this was typified in the dying of the Lord Jesus, when from his pierced side there came forth blood and water; the one to atone, the other to purify. But not to lay too much stress on an historical incident, and which can be physically accounted for, the truth to which we allude is most expressly asserted in the word of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. We need one, as well as the other. And if we were not sanctified, as well as justified, we could neither serve God properly, nor enjoy him. Suppose an unrenewed man pardoned: he would be no more able to see the kingdom of God than before; but would feel the company, the pleasures, and employments, of the state, uncongenial and irksome. Or suppose you had a son; and you forbad him to enter a place of contagion, on pain of losing all you could leave him. He goes, and is seized with the infection. He thus is not only guilty, by transgressing your command; but he is also diseased. And do you not perceive, that your *forgiving* him does not *heal* him? He wants not only the father's pardon, but the physician's aid; and in vain is he freed from the forfeiture of his estate, if he be left under the power of his disorder.

Let us, therefore, judge of the one by the

other; and make our election, by making our calling sure. To be justified freely from all things; to have passed from death unto life; and never to come into condemnation again, is a privilege of infinite value; and there is a possibility of knowing that it belongs to us. But how is it to be known? Not by an audible voice from heaven, as the woman heard —"Thy sins are forgiven thee." Not by a sudden impulse, or working the mind into a persuasion which we are unable to justify. For the very thing to be determined is, whether this confidence be a good hope through grace, or a mere presumption. If the confidence itself were sufficient, the Antinomian would be surer than the Christian; but he has a lie in his right hand. The Sacred Writers do not consider this certainty of mind as self-proved; nor regard all apprehensions of its wavering, as unbelief. They tell us to "fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." They call upon us to "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith;" and to "prove our own selves." "We know," says John, "that we have passed from death unto life—because we love the brethren." "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." This is the way, walk ye in it—What is the Spirit which he hath given you? Does it convince of sin? Does it cause you to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Does it glorify Christ?

It is true that our souls are justified by faith; but faith is justified by works. Has this promise been fulfilled in us? "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." As far as we are strangers to this practice, and to these dispositions, whatever our knowledge, or our assurance may be, we ought to tremble. For though the grace of God finds us sinners, it does not leave us such. While it "bringeth salvation," it teaches us "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

JULY 9.

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Luke xi. 1.

Though "one" of the disciples only said this, we have no reason to think the rest differed from him in sentiment. He was the mouth for them all. When our Lord said to the twelve, Will *ye* also go away? *Peter* answered—but it was in the name of his brethren; and expressed the conviction of each of them—"Lord, to whom shall *we* go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." It is very probable *he* was the speaker here: for his heart was always very near his lips. But whoever the speaker was, every thing here was praiseworthy.

I admire his decorum. Some are satisfied with the moralities of conduct; but there are the proprieties too; and these are not to be overlooked. "Let every thing be done," says the Scripture, "decently, and in order." This should be peculiarly the case in our holy assemblies. Let us guard against every thing that is unseemly and disturbing. Let us avoid coughing as much as we can. Let us not look and stare all over the house of God. Let us not talk or whisper. Let us beware of coming in during the service. How painful and injurious is it to the preacher and worshipper to be interrupted and diverted in those sacred moments in which we ought to attend on the Lord without distraction. Observe these disciples. They surrounded our Saviour while he was engaged—but with breathless silence; and did not break in upon his devotion, but waited—till he had "ceased praying."

I admire his emulation. Having heard his Master, he began to say, Well, this *is* prayer. What dignity! What wisdom! What reverence! What submission! What fervour are here! According to this, we have never prayed yet. Lord, teach us to pray. Indeed, the more we attend on him in any thing, the less shall we think of ourselves. The beams of this Sun will soon darken our tapers.

I admire his wish to resemble what he so much admired. We should always endeavour to improve by the superior endowments and excellences of others. These should not excite envy, or yield discouragement; but excite to imitation. What others are, they are by grace: and when we see how any of our fellow-Christians bear prosperity; or endure affliction; or fill up their stations; we should be anxious to follow them, even as they follow Christ.

I admire his spiritual wisdom. Some wish to resemble others in worldly possessions; or bodily qualities; or mental endowments and acquisitions. But it is better to resemble them in grace, than in any of these. Many would rule, or compose, or speak like others; but the thing is, *to pray like them.* It is by prayer we hold communion with God. It is by this

we unlock all his treasures. He that knows how to pray, has the secret of safety in prosperity, and of support in trouble. He has the art of overruling every enemy, and of turning every loss into a gain. He has the power of soothing every care; of subduing every passion; of adding a relish to every enjoyment—The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver; and the gain thereof, than much fine gold. Many things are good for me; but none so good as to draw nigh to God.

I admire his humility. He is convinced that they are not sufficient of themselves for the duty, but need Divine aid. We want instruction in every thing. The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps: but we peculiarly need guidance here. The Spirit helpeth *our* infirmities, says the Apostle; for *we* know not what to pray for as we ought. The best of men have erred in their prayer. Take my life from me, says Elijah, in the very midst of his usefulness. I beseech Thee, says Moses, show me thy glory. You ask for death, says God; for no man can see me, and live. "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" What would children be—how miserable—how useless—what burdens to themselves—and what plagues to others, if they had whatsoever they desired! As to temporal blessings, it is hard to distinguish between our real and our imaginary wants; and between what is pleasing, and what is profitable. And even as to spiritual things, we never see their beauty and glory, so as to desire them supremely, till the Lord teaches us to profit. Nor do we know of ourselves how to come before the Lord, and deal concerning them. Under a sense of guilt, and a concern to obtain acceptance, what strange expedients do we often adopt, and what a self-righteous traffic do we carry on, before we come to the blood of sprinkling, and make mention of his righteousness only! We may also err, as to our end and aim. We often ask, and receive not, because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts.

—"An easy thing to pray!" Who that has made the trial, and is concerned for the result of it, but exclaims, with Elihu, "Teach us what we shall say unto Him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness?" or, with the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray?"

JULY 10

"*Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*"—2 Cor. ix. 15.

We have always been accustomed to think of Christ when these words are pronounced: and we are not disposed to give up this application without necessity. And we see no such necessity if we appeal to authority: for, not to mention many of the ancients, this application is supported by many of the moderns also; by a Henry, a Scott, a Doddridge. And we see no such necessity if we refer to the writer of the words. Paul's mind was full of Christ; the love of Christ constrained him: and nothing is more common in his Epistles than sudden and unlooked-for allusions to him. To which we may add, the nature of the case itself: for if the words would apply to the charity of the Corinthians, how much stronger will they apply to the Saviour of sinners! And though we would do justice to every part of the Scripture, we would yet rather be followers of Cocceius than Crellius, of whom, as expositors of the Bible, it was said, the one found Christ every where, the other nowhere.

God then—this is the meaning, so loved the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Yea, he is not only a gift, but an UNSPEAKABLE gift. Much has indeed been said of this gift; in Christian conversation; in the sermons of ministers; in the preaching of Prophets and Apostles; in the Scriptures of truth, of which it is the principal, and, in a sense, the only subject. But it is not in the power of words to do it justice. And we see how even inspired men labour for terms and images, when they would hold forth a little of the Saviour's glory.

He is a gift unspeakable—if we consider the greatness of his person. We consider him a man of sorrows: but he was not always so. He was born in the fulness of time: but his goings forth were from of old from everlasting. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Unspeakable—if we consider the immensity of the plenitude which he possesses, as Mediator, for our use. Some things include many more. What an unspeakable blessing is a fountain, being the source of all the refreshing streams that flow from it, and fertilize and beautify the ground! What an unspeakable blessing is the sun, that makes our day, our spring, our summer!—What would the earth be without the sun! What an unspeakable blessing is life, with all its intelligence, pursuits, productions, and enjoyments! *He*

is the fountain of living waters. *He* is the Sun of righteousness. *He* is the life of the soul and eternity. He not only insures every thing else, but contains it. In him it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. In him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

—And can we think of this, and not exclaim—*Thanks* be unto God for his unspeakable gift! Nothing is so detestable as ingratitude. The very heathens condemned it. One of their philosophers said, Call a man ungrateful and you call him every thing that is vile. The Lacedæmonians made it punishable. South compares such a wretch to the sea, that turns the sweet influences of the clouds into brine; and to the grave, which is always receiving and never restoring. How soon we complain of a want of thankfulness in our fellow-creatures towards ourselves! How soon do we abandon them, when our favours seem lost upon them!

And yet what *are* these favours, when, too, from a community of nature, and the command of God, we are under an obligation to show them! How few! How small! How far from being entirely pure in their motive! With how little self-denial and sacrifice attended! Herein is love! not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And can this love deserve only a careless reflection of the mind? Or a cold acknowledgment of the lip? Ought it not to claim and consecrate the heart? Ought we not to ask, every moment, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? Ought we not, by the mercies of God, to present our bodies a living sacrifice?

> "Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
> That were a present far too small:
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all."

JULY 11.

"*And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.*"—1 Kings xix. 8.

Having, on Mount Carmel, witnessed the triumph of truth over idolatry; and destroyed Baal's prophets; and predicted the return of rain: and urged the king to hasten home, lest he should be impeded by the approaching torrents; "Elijah girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." Had Ahab properly regarded Elijah, he would have taken him up into his chariot, as the Eunuch did Philip; and have honoured him before his attendants; and conversed with him respecting the awful state of the country. But he did not cordially like him: and was happy to get rid of him as soon as possible, as Felix said unto Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee."

But we admire the conduct of Elijah. He was not elated by the recent unparalleled honours conferred upon him above the duty of a subject; and, therefore, notwithstanding the character of Ahab, he pays respect to him as his sovereign; and renders honour to whom honour was officially due.

It is probable that Elijah came to Jezreel to carry on the reformation he had begun; and hoping that the late miracle would give him a powerful influence. But soon after he arrives in the suburbs, he learns the determination, not of the queen consort, but of the queen *regent* (for Ahab, though king, was completely governed by a termagant wife), to put him to death. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." Upon this he should have stood his ground, and have resolved to go on with his work, leaving events with God, and relying upon that providence and grace which had so signally appeared for him. He should have replied, as Chrysostom did, when Eudoxia, the empress, threatened him—"Go, tell her that I fear nothing but sin:" or as Bazil did, when Valerius, the Arian emperor, sent him word that he would put him to death—"I would that he would; I shall only get to heaven the sooner;" or as Luther did, when they would have dissuaded him from going to Worms—"I would go if there were as many devils there as there are tiles upon the houses:" or as the prince of Condé did to the French king, when he proposed that he should go to mass, or suffer perpetual banishment, or death—"As to the first of these, by the grace of God, I never will; and as to the other two, I leave the choice of either to your majesty."

But where is the faith that never staggers through unbelief? The hand that never hangs down? The knee that never trembles? We are amazed at the magnanimity of Elijah before, in reproving Ahab to his face, opposing single-handed all the followers of Baal, and slaying Jezebel's four hundred and fifty chaplains! But what is man! He cannot stand longer than God holds him, or walk further than God leads him—This same hero now turns pale, and flees for his life! "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there." And why did he leave him? Was it from tenderness, wishing to save him from the perils to which he himself was exposed? Or was it the more perfectly to conceal his movements, as one could be more easily hid than more? Or did he wish for unrestrained,

unwitnessed intercourse with God? There are seasons, and places, in which we wish no eye to see, no ear to hear, but God to be all in all. Abraham left his young men below when he ascended to worship God. And Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, in the garden, Tarry ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

However this was, "he went a day's journey into the Wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree:" and, fatigued with journeying and hunger; and harassed with forebodings; and despairing of further success in his exertions; he asked to resign, not only his office, but his life—"He requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers"—That is, I am not fitter to bear their trials, or discharge their duties, than they were. Why then should I remain, when they are removed? I have done and suffered my share. This was the language of nature, not of grace. Children grow fretful as they grow sleepy. Paul longed to depart, to be with Christ, which was far better; yet he was willing to abide in the flesh, because it was needful for others. While we are ready to go, we must also be willing to stay, if God has any thing for us to do, or to suffer. To be impatient for retreat, especially as soon as we meet with disappointment, is unmanly and sinful.

Though Elijah was forward to die, it was a peevish haste, and evinced that he was in a very improper frame for the event.—But God remembered that he was dust, compassionated his weakness, and appeared for him, even in a strait of his own producing, and dealt not with him after his desert. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again." Before, He had fed him by ravens; now he supplies him by one of those heavenly messengers who are all ministering spirits unto the heirs of salvation. The office seems beneath one of these glorious beings. But he was as much pleased to bring a meal to this weary traveller, as he would have been, had he received orders to manage the affairs of an empire. Angels have no partialities. They consider not the *nature* of the command, but only the *Author*. May His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!

But what *was* the meal! A cake of bread and a cruse of water! Nature is content with little; and grace with less. How many disorders arise from access! A voracious appetite is a judgment. A delicate one is an infirmity. A dainty one is a disgrace. Ministers, above all men, should not be given to appetite, or be fond of dainty meats. As I those who entertain them should not insult them by the nature and the degree of their preparations. Did our Saviour require much serving? Did not he reprove Martha for being cumbered about many things? When an angel was the guest, Abraham brought him forth a cake, baked on the hearth, with butter and milk. And when an angel, who had the command of every store, catered for the greatest and best man of the age, it was a cake of bread and a cruse of water.

But "the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise, and eat; because the journey is too great for thee." God's caring for his people is not only relieving, but prospective. He foresees what they will need, and prepares them for difficulties and duties which they had not reckoned upon. He strengthens the shoulder when the burden is going to be increased. And when he gives them an additional supply of faith, hope, peace, and joy; little, perhaps, do they imagine what trials they are to endure, or what steps they are to take, in the strength of it!

But how was Elijah fitted for his journey! Surely the sustenance derived from this meal was miraculous. But it shows us what his power can do; and teaches us that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. "And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." And why did he choose to repair hither? Would no other place have afforded him an equally safe retreat! Was he actuated by curiosity? or piety? Here was much to strike his mind, and to aid his faith and devotion. Here, would he say, Israel encamped! Here fell manna! Here moved, and here stood, the fiery cloudy pillar! On the top of this hill God spake all the words of his Law! And *there* God spake with Moses, face to face!—How much is connected with some spots! "They are none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven."

JULY 12.

"*I die daily.*"—1 Cor. xv. 31.

We need not confine the meaning; but take the expression in all its latitude of import. In what sense could not Paul make this acknowledgment? In what sense is it not possible, or proper, for us to make it?

First. He died daily, because he professed to preach the Gospel, in constant hazard of life. "In labours," says he, "more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have

been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Well might *he* affirm, "I die daily." In this sense, you say, the words are not applicable to you. It is true, from many of his dangers you are secure. Your religion is not exposing you to the loss of your life; or even of your liberty, or your substance. But do not even *you* die daily! Are not you in jeopardy every hour? Are you not surrounded by wicked and unreasonable men, whose vices and passions would destroy you, without the restraining providence of God? Are you not liable to a thousand accidents? What a frail thing is the human body! How strange that such a curious machine, composed of such a multitude of delicate organs, should continue so long in force and operation! Know you not that the heart beats seconds, and that sixty movements of the blood take place every minute—so that sixty times every minute the question is asked whether we are to live or die! We die daily!

Secondly. Paul could say this, as death was actually invading him daily. And this is the case with us. We are mortal, not only in destination, but in state. We decay while we receive sustenance. We talk of dying! But is dying a future thing? Have we not always been dying?

> "The moment we begin to live,
> We all begin to die."

We talk of dying! Why many of us are half dead already; and some much more. Many of our connexions are dead: many of our comforts: many of our hopes. We have buried many of our opportunities, and days, and years—and every year, and every day, brings us near the *entire* end of the whole. It is absurd to confine dying to the act of separation between soul and body—This is only the finishing stroke—We die daily.

Thirdly. Paul, by a moral decease, died daily. So should we. To die to an object, according to Scripture, is to have no more connexion with it, or attachment to it. Thus the Apostle says to the Romans, "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein!" And this moral dying is frequently expressed by the word crucifixion, in allusion to the mode of it; and to remind us also of the cause, as well as the example. Hence it is said, "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin; for he that is dead is" thus "freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Thus the Christian dies daily, by a course of mortification to sin, and the world, and the impression of things seen and temporal, and the power of temptation—"For they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts."

Fourthly. Paul died daily, by a readiness for his dissolution, whenever it should take place. And the man who is like-minded will feel a concern to be prepared to die; to die in a good state, and in a good frame; to die safely; to die cheerfully; to die glorifying God; and having an *abundant* entrance ministered unto him into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. And this must commence with the Apostle's desire, "To win Christ and be found in him." Nothing can be done to purpose, in our preparation for eternity, till we have said, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." The voice from heaven only pronounces those blessed who "die in the Lord;" in a state of union and communion with him: having his righteousness to give them a title to heaven, and his grace to give them a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

But we should be concerned, not only to be habitually, but actually ready to die. That is, to be in a waiting posture; having our loins girded, and our lamps burning; keeping our consciences clear and calm; drawing off our affections from earth; that when the summons comes we may be willing to depart, and not be constrained to plead, "O spare me a little, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more." In the history of Charles V., emperor of Germany, we are told, that he resigned the reins of government, and retired into a convent in Spain. There he resolved to celebrate his own obsequies. For this purpose, he ordered his tomb to be erected in the chapel of the monastery of St. Justus. Thither, at the proper season, all his domestics were ordered to march in funeral procession, carrying in their hands black tapers. The Emperor followed in his shroud. Arrived at the place, he was laid in his coffin. The service of the dead was performed: and when the ceremonies were ended, the doors were closed, the attendants dismissed, and he was left alone. After remaining some time in the grave, he arose, and repaired to his apartment, filled with all those awful reflections which the solemnity was adapted to inspire.—Now we do not recommend the practice of such a gloomy and abject superstition. But you may sanctify the expedient, at least, in thought. You may anticipate an event that must befall you. And, oh that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end! Oh that you would remember, that the services you perform for others, will cer

tainly be required for yourselves! Oh that when you see man going to his long home, and the mourners going about the streets, you would say, "I also am accomplishing, as an hireling, my day; and in a little time, my neighbours, friends, and relations, will seek me—and I shall not be!"

—Would it be improper or useless for you, in imagination, to suppose yourselves—entering your sick-chamber—stretched upon a bed of languishing—dying—wrapped up in your winding-sheet—laid in your coffin—friends, for the last time, touching your cold cheek with their lips or the back of their hand—the lid screwed down—and your remains borne through the mutes at the door—and accompanied to the grave—and left there—while the spirit had returned to God, who gave it. In endeavouring to realize this condition, I ask, How would the world appear? What would you think of the censure or praise of men? What, of many of your pursuits? Would not this check the levity of the mind, and the pride of life?—Would not also this contemplation break the force of surprise?

"Familiar thoughts can slope the way to death."

—But if we think not of the subject, the event will be a sudden precipice.

The sum of human wisdom is, to keep us from surprise in any thing: the sum of divine wisdom is, to keep us from surprise in death. We know not how soon the event may come. Nor in what manner it may befall us. It may not wait the close of threescore years and ten. It may not announce its approach by the common warnings of sickness. If we have not learned this truth already from our observations of mortality—neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

JULY 13.

"*I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.*"—Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

That is, what he had been promising; and notwithstanding the freeness and certainty of the engagement. Such is the revealed "will" of God. And his will is *law;* and law from which there lies no appeal. Nothing, therefore, can dispense with the obligation of prayer. But let us look at this fact.

As we have no claims upon God, and all he does for us must be from pure mercy and grace; no one can deny that he has *a right* to determine the way in which his favours shall be conferred. Nor can it be questioned that he is the most *competent judge* in this case; for his understanding is infinite: he knows himself and his relations; and he knows us and our welfare perfectly.

Yet let us not suppose that he acts arbitrarily, though he may act sovereignly. And let us remember, too, that his acting sovereignly does not consist in his acting without reasons, but in his being governed by reasons which are often far above out of our sight.

His wisdom and his goodness are to be seen here as plainly as his authority. Some vainly ask, Where is the propriety of prayer? Can prayer be necessary to inform a Being, perfect in knowledge? Or to excite a Being, always ready to do good? Or to induce a Being, with whom there is no variableness, to change his measures? But the question is beside the mark. What is not necessary as to God, may be necessary as to *us.* Religion is founded not in *his* wants, but in *ours.* Does not something of this kind obtain among all ranks and conditions of our fellow-creatures? All-parental as you are, do you always dispense with your child's asking for what he wants? As a master, though willing to forgive, do you not deem it needful to require the servant that offended you to confess his fault and implore pardon?

How many are the advantages arising from God's requiring us to ask, that we may have, and seek, that we may find! The exercise of prayer keeps alive a sense of our indigence and dependence. Every time I go to God in prayer, I am reminded that I am ignorant, and that he is wise; that I am weak, and that he is powerful; that I am guilty and miserable, and that he is merciful and gracious; that I am nothing, and that he is all in all.

Prayer, by bringing us into the presence of God, will impress us with his excellences; and the intercourse we have with him, will lead us to admire, and fear, and love, and resemble him. For we soon catch the spirit, and take off the manners of those with whom we are intimate; especially if they are above us, and we much esteem them. It is said, that those who are about the court have an air and an address peculiar to themselves; and that it is difficult, if not impossible, for another to assume it. A man who is much at the throne of grace, will betray it in a manner of feeling, speaking, and acting, that a religious pretender can never entirely exemplify.

Hereby, too, the blessing is more endeared, and enhanced. We never much regard what we acquire without application or effort. The effort is a kind of price: and we judge of the commodity by the cost. That which *blesses* us, is what relieves our *wants;* fulfils our *desire;* accomplishes our *hope;* crowns our *sacrifices.* God's blessings are not bestowed upon those who are incapable of feeling their value: they would *then* yield neither pleasure to the receiver, nor praise to the giver. His way, therefore, is to make us sensible of our need; to show us the importance and excellency of the favours; and to draw forth our souls after them. Then we are in his way. Then we can plead his promise. For blessed

are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

JULY 14.

"*My peace I give unto you.*"—John xiv. 27.

PEACE sometimes signifies a confluence of temporal good things. This is not the meaning of it here. Our Saviour himself was poor, and a man of sorrows. And he said to his disciples, In the world ye shall have tribulation. Yet at the same time they were to have peace in him. This peace, therefore, must have been something which trouble could not hinder or injure. It must have been a spiritual privilege—composure of mind; especially—for here is the source of the greatest perplexity and disquietude; the calm of conscience, arising from a hope of our acceptance in the Beloved. Before it can be enjoyed, the awful breach between God and us must be healed; and the blessed partaker of it be able to say, Thou wast angry with me; but thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. For there must be a sense of apprehension of God's favour, which is life. I may be pardoned; but if I am ignorant of my forgiveness, my anxieties and uneasinesses will remain. But when He says to my soul, I am thy salvation, then, being justified by faith, I have peace with God—not only peace with him above, but peace with him within—a peace that passeth all understanding.

For who can adequately conceive the value of this donation? We need not descend into the depths of hell, to inquire what the miserable victims of despair would give for a moment's enjoyment of it. Let those speak who have been convinced of sin, who have felt a wounded spirit, and, expecting to fall into the hand of the living God, have exclaimed, What must I do to be saved? What were the feelings of the manslayer, with the avenger of blood urging on at his heels? And what was the change he experienced, as soon as he entered the appointed asylum, and could turn round and face the foe! Say ye—for ye have realized the blessed transition—ye who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you.

> "'Tis a young heav'n on earthly ground,
> And glory in the bud."

It is a cluster of the grapes of Eshcol. It weans from the world. It enlivens duty. It smooths the rugged path of adversity. It turns a dying chamber into the house of God and the gate of heaven.

But the Saviour calls it his peace—"*My* peace I give unto you." It would be a low sense of this, though a true one, that he came and preached it. It was his in an infinitely more expensive way. He procured it for us. He came not to tell us the way to heaven, but to be the way: not to show us how to make our peace with God, but to make it. And he *did* make it: we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. He made peace by the blood of his Cross. And he applies it by the agency of his Holy Spirit; enabling us to believe, and enter into rest; and maintaining our hope in all the changes of life, and under a continued sense of our unworthiness and guilt.

Nor is it more his by derivation than distinction. Many have peace; but how unlike his! There is the peace of the sinner. This is of Satanic origin. The strong man armed keepeth his palace and his goods in peace. This peace is worse than war. It is not founded in conviction, but ignorance. It cannot endure thought. It is unworthy of the name of peace—There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. How can a man retire, and go to sleep, when, if he dies before the morning, (and how easily may his bed become his grave!) God is under an oath to destroy him? He denies it, or forgets. There is the peace of the self-righteous Pharisee; and the peace of the evangelical hypocrite; both of which will prove as the spider's web, and as the giving up of the ghost.—There is the peace of the worldling, who, in the calm of his fireside, or evening's walk, musing on his abundance, says, O my soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But he may, that very night, have his soul required of him; and then whose are those things which he has provided? What is it to be at ease in our circumstances, and to enjoy peace with our neighbours, and in our families, while we are at war with God, and his wrath abideth on us!

—But this man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land! Look to him. Repair to him. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up all their wounds." While you neglect him, you may seek peace, but you will never find it. But he cries—oh! hear him—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And is not this the very thing you want? Rest? Rest unto your souls? Believe. Try his word. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

JULY 15.

"*It came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is*

not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."—Matt. xiii. 53—58.

—His own country here means, not Bethany, where he was born, but Nazareth, where he had been brought up. It was a poor and despised place; so that it was proverbially asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Yet there was he found, who is the King of glory!

Here he taught in their synagogues. *What* he taught is not recorded. But we may determine the substance of it from his addresses on other occasions, and from the end which he always kept in view—"to seek and to save that which was lost." Of his *manner* of teaching, we cannot form an adequate conception. It was all his own. "Grace was poured into his lips." Even those who derived no saving advantage from it—even his enemies—said, "Never man spake like this man."

Accordingly, the people were astonished. Wonder has its place in religion; and there is every thing in the Gospel to call it forth. Yet many emotions of this kind are not powerful enough to produce any decisive result: and the subjects of them behold, and wonder, and perish. Thus it was here. They acknowledge his works to be mighty works, that is, miraculous; but are offended with his want of education, having been at no university: at the feet of no Gamaliel, never having learned letters. And also because he was not a man of birth and rank; but had relations in common life, and was himself engaged in manual employment. See how the god of this world blinds the minds of them that believe not. Who can stand before envy and prejudice? If he had the wisdom, and did the works—both of which they admitted, surely it was the more commendable, and the more marvellous, that he was so pre-eminent without any ordinary helps: and the more likely was he to be divinely inspired. There seemed no other way of accounting for the prodigy. And this seems to strike them. But men do not value things according to their real excellence. And when there is not a cordial liking to any subject, every circumstance, which would otherwise befriend, is converted into objection.

In answer to their offence, our Saviour remarks, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." Usefulness depends upon acceptance; and acceptance upon esteem. Hence a bishop is to have a good report of them that are without; and hearers are commanded not only to receive such, but to hold them in reputation. Those who have been above a man in condition, do not like to come down and listen to him as an instructer and reprover: and those who have been his equals have been too familiar with him to feel veneration towards him. Many things, though quite consistent with sanctity, yet breed not that reverence and respect which attach to a man that comes to us, so to speak, from a kind of distance, and is only seen through the medium of his sacred office. The case, here stated, is not universally and absolutely true. But it is so generally and comparatively: and even our Saviour himself was not an exception to it. After this, some of his servants need not be astonished at the treatment they experience. Neither should they fret and complain. They must take human nature as it is, and accommodate themselves, as much as they can, prudently and innocently, to the actual state of society. This governed the Master; and he assigns it as the reason why he preferred labouring elsewhere—"He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

What a conclusion is here!—"And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." *Some* he did. Mark says, he laid his hands on a few sick folk, and healed them—but what was the prevention of more? He generally required faith in his miraculous exertions. Hence the expressions—Be it unto thee according to thy faith—Believest thou that I am able to do this?—If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. There were, indeed, some cases in which he wrought without this; at least without the faith of the individual himself: though even then, faith was found in those who applied on his behalf; or who brought him to Jesus.

But faith is *always* necessary in spiritual operations. He can produce faith within us; but he cannot carry on his works of grace without it. If he could, it would be in contradiction to his word; and by a blind, positive, physical force, without our knowledge, feeling, wishes, or designs. But this is not his way. He does every thing by faith. We are saved through faith. Hence the importance of believing. The first, the chief concern is, to get faith. Talk not of the sufficiency and excellency of the remedy—it cannot heal us unless it be applied; and it can only be applied by faith. The Gospel is the power of God to salvation—but it is only to every one that believeth.

There is something infinitely evil in unbelief, if we only consider what it *prevents*. It

stands, and it is the only thing that does stand, between a sinner and the relief of the Gospel. Let him believe, and he is saved. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that believeth, hath the Son. As to others, the wrath of God abideth on them; for nothing else can withdraw them from under it. The Jews could not enter into Canaan, because of their unbelief. It equally bars heaven against us. But what mighty works attend faith! By faith we are justified. By faith we are sanctified. We stand, we walk, we live, we conquer by faith.

And what an injurious bar to a Christian himself is unbelief! How much does it hinder him from achieving in a way of duty, and realizing in a way of privilege! What keeps him so weak and wavering! Unbelief. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." If we depend on our frames and feelings, we draw from a summer brook, instead of the well of living waters. Pleasing experiences are cordials; but faith furnishes the soul's food. Faith in the promises would immediately tranquillize us, as it did Paul in the storm—"Be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be as it was told me." What keeps a Christian so poor in consolation? Unbelief. "Filled with all joy and peace in believing." "Believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Who would not, then, by faith, let loose all the sources of Divine mercy and grace!

Who would not cry out, with tears, "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief!"

JULY 16.

"*Call to remembrance the former days.*"
Heb. x. 32.

This will soon convince us that there is nothing new under the sun; and keep us from saying, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" In many respects we have the advantage. In knowledge, and civilization, and liberty, and trade, and the conveniences and comforts of life, and above all, in spiritual privileges, we far surpass our predecessors.

If we look back to the period of Judaism, we shall have reason to say, "Blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear: for many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things that we see, and did not see them, and to hear the things that we hear, and did not hear them." They had the type, we have the reality; they had the promise, we have the accomplishment; they had the dawn, we have the day—God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

If we look back to the period previous to the entrance of the Gospel into our own country, what were our ancestors? Naked painted savages in the woods; oppressed by cruel rites; enslaved by idolatry; being without Christ; strangers to the commonwealth of Israel; having no hope, and without God in the world.

We were called Christians long before the Reformation. But look at the period prior to that auspicious event. In what a state of mental degradation were we—religion superstition—the service performed in an unknown tongue—the Scriptures kept from the common people—and nothing suffered to peep or mutter, but as priestcraft gave leave!

And when men began to know the words of life, and to serve God in spirit and in truth, what interdictions were they under: and to what fines, imprisonments, tortures, deaths, were they exposed by the spirit of persecution—Popish and even Protestant! Remember the former times, in which your forefathers endured a great fight of affliction for conscience' sake. Think how they would have rejoiced to see a day in which we sit under our own vine and fig-tree, and none can make us afraid; in which the Gospel is spreading far and wide; in which individuals, and churches, and communities, combine to make manifest the savour of the Redeemer's knowledge in every place. Christians should judge by a rule of their own; and deem those the best times in which the best cause flourishes most. We therefore live in the most preferable æra the world ever yet witnessed.

But it is well for us also to remember the earlier periods of our own personal history and experience; our days of religious nothingness, when we never called upon his Name, and had no fear of God before our eyes. What feelings does the review of these days require!

But other days, better days, blessed days followed, after we knew God, or rather were known of him. *He* remembers these: "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase." And shall we forget them? Can we forget them?

"How sweet their memory still!"

In one respect the review must be humbling. For how little has our practice corresponded with our profession! or our proficiency with our advantages! Yea, instead of advancing, have not we stood still, or rather have we not gone back? We read of "the first ways of David." They were, alas! his best. The king of Israel never equalled the shepherd of Bethlehem. When at ease in Zion his soul prospered much less than when he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. And

have *we* never sighed, "Oh that it was with me as in months past!" Here is the charge, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Let us not deny it; but remember from whence we are fallen, and repent, and do our first works.

Are we in trouble! Do we see no way for our escape! Does God seem to have forgotten to be gracious! Let us remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. His love, and power, and truth are still the same. And because he has been my help, therefore, under the shadow of his wing will I rejoice.

JULY 17.

"*Ye have an unction from the Holy One.*"
1 John ii. 20.

Who is this Holy One? Unquestionably the Lord Jesus. It was one of the names by which he was known in the days of his flesh. The devils knew him by it; and said, We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. Ye denied, said Peter and John to the Jews, the Holy One and the Just. He was so called from the innocency of his life; the purity of his nature; and the eminency of his perfections: and therefore, in a sense, applicable to no mere creature. God is often called the Holy One, in the Old Testament: and, alluding to the very place where holiness is thrice ascribed to him by the Seraphim, the Evangelist affirms, "This said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." He is relatively, as well as personally holy; and evangelically, as well as legally. He is as holy in his Gospel as in his Law. He is as holy in his dispensations as in his ordinances. He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He came by water, as well as by blood; and gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works—And though he will bring millions from the depraved race of Adam to glory, he will bring them all there, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

And what is this unction from Him? John was a Jew; and well knew that oil, unction, anointing, it is all the same thing, was used to consecrate, to beautify, to refresh and delight. The word therefore is used here for the influence of the Holy Spirit. And this is derived from the Lord Jesus. This was typified in the case of Aaron, when the oil was poured upon his head, and went down to the skirts of his garments. So here, the unction descends from the head of the Church to the lowest members of the body. Hence it is so often called the Spirit of Christ. It comes to us through his mediation; and it comes to us from his possession. For it was not, as Mr. Howe observes, the design and effect of the sufferings and death of Christ, that the Spirit should be given immediately to any individuals; but that the whole dispensation should be lodged in his hands, and the administration be the honour of his office. He received gifts for men: and this was the chief of them. Being by the right hand of God exalted, says Peter, and having received of the Father the promise of the Spirit, *he* hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. He therefore said to his disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you"—"And he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Thus it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell. And of his fulness, says every saved, every sanctified sinner, have all we received, and grace for grace.

Have we this unction from the Holy One? If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Destitute of this, our religion will be a form of godliness, without the power; the practice, without the principle; duty, without delight—a task—wearisomeness—vanity. We can only know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.

If strangers to the benefit, let us seek it. We know to whom we are to apply. He is able, he is willing, to give us the supply of his own Spirit. How encouraging to address ourselves to one who loved us, and gave himself for us; who says, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; who never sent one suppliant empty away—who never will—never can—for he cannot deny himself.

Cherish this unction. It is what the Apostle means, when he says, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, by which ye are sealed to the day of redemption." Not only does gratitude require this, because of what the Spirit has already done for you; but a concern for your own welfare. What can you do, without his aids and comforts! In consequence of his sin, David feared the entire loss of his agency; and therefore cried, Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Yea, he had suffered the loss of the consolation and support which he alone can give—*Restore* unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.

Let us diffuse this unction. Let us make manifest the savour of the Redeemer's knowledge, in every place; in every condition; in every company. Let it so abound in our conduct, temper, and discourse, that we may be distinguished and recommended by it. So

that all may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

JULY 18.

God who is rich in mercy."—Ephes. ii. 4.

In a thousand things God entirely eludes our research. In every thing he surpasses our comprehension. But we know that he is merciful; we are sure that he is rich in mercy. And we cannot be too thankful, that the eminence of an attribute, so essential to our happiness and hope, is not obscurely revealed, but so plainly and fully made known, in the works of his hands; the dispensations of his providence; the promises of his word; the provisions of his house; and the Son of his love.

For who does not need this assurance? The self-righteous Pharisee, who thanks God that he is not as other men are—he does not require it. And the proud pretender, who is free from all sin—he does not require it—he formerly required it; but he has now attained, he is now already perfect. But there are four classes of characters to whom it must be like life from the dead.

First. The victims of affliction. These are not rarely to be met with in this vale of tears. To such we would say—We ask you not what your distresses are; but if oppressed, pray, Lord, undertake for me. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. Repair not, under the pressure of wo, to the rope, or the bowl of intoxication, or the dissipations of the world—this is like Saul's going to the witch of Endor: but go to the throne of the heavenly grace, imploring the pity of the God of all comfort. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is your welfare that has called forth this seeming severity. He knows your frame. He remembereth that you are dust. He lays upon you no more than he will enable you to bear. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. When the benevolent end of the dispensation is answered, he will readily lay aside the rod, and say, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord. Set thee up waymarks, make the high heaps: set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities."

Secondly. Convinced penitents. They were formerly always extenuating their guilt: now they are dwelling only upon the aggravations of it. Lately they seemed unsusceptible of alarm; now they refuse to be comforted. Such is their unworthiness! The number and greatness of their sins! They are cast out of his sight! And there is only, for *them*, a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation! But, awakened sinner, remember there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. There is everlasting consolation, and good hope, through *grace*. With the Lord there is mercy; and with him is plenteous redemption. Judge not of his goodness by a human standard. Who is a God like unto him! View him not through the medium of your own feelings. Believe his own word, wherein he assures you, that he is ready to forgive; that he will abundantly pardon. Believe his oath, wherein he swears by himself—"As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn, and live ye."

Thirdly. Desponding backsliders. These, after walking in the way everlasting, have fallen by their iniquity: and perhaps feel more anguish of mind, than when they were first led to repentance. They say, and they say justly, "No one has sinned with such enhancement as I have done. I have sinned in the dearest relations, and under the highest obligations, and against the greatest advantages. I have sinned after being made to know what an evil and bitter thing it is; and also after tasting that the Lord is gracious. My sin has been more injurious in its effects than that of others: it has more dishonoured religion, and grieved the holy Spirit of God." All this they ought to feel—Yet must not *they* forget, that he is rich in mercy. It is this belief that will break the heart most, and make it sorrow after a godly sort. It is this alone that will lead them forward, with weeping and supplication, saying, Lord, take away all iniquity: create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. And He—will He refuse to reply, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him?"

> "Return, ye wandering souls, return,
> And seek his tender breast;
> Call back the memory of those days
> When there you found your rest.
>
> "Behold, great God, we come to Thee,
> Though blushes veil our face;
> Constrain'd our last retreat to seek
> In thy much-injured grace."

Fourthly. Persevering believers. These have holden on their way; and, having obtained help of God, continue to this day. They ought therefore, to feel thankful. Yet it becomes them, also, to be humble. Indeed, the more they advance in the divine life, the more will they be dissatisfied with themselves. They will be deeply affected with a sense of their unprofitableness, and numberless infirmities. If their outward conduct has been fair to men, they know how little their heart has been right with God. They know, the sins of their holy things would be enough to condemn them, if God should bring them into judgment with him. *Their* language, there-

fore, still is, God be merciful to me, a sinner. This is *their* only relief—He is rich in mercy. And living—and dying—they "look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

JULY 19.

"*As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*"—Ezek. i. 28.

THERE is always ground for the Prophet's complaint; "Seeing many things, they *observe* not." How often do even objects, peculiarly designed and adapted to excite and impress, fail to strike; or at least to awaken any proper attention! This is the case with the rainbow. Children wonder at the novelty, grandeur, and construction of the figure; but seldom ask a question about it. The common people, who are much abroad in the field, rarely give it a gaze; and never connect a thought with it, but as it may be supposed, by the time of its exhibition, to intimate the state of the weather. And what does the philosopher? In the pride of science, he despises the vulgar; but, although able to explain the mediate cause of the phenomenon, he never looks after any thing the Scripture says concerning it. But who is, not only a naturalist, but a moralist? And not only a moralist, but a Christian? A Christian in the field, as well as in the temple? making that which is seen and temporal, the means of communion with that which is unseen and eternal!

The rainbow may be viewed three ways. First. Physically. Thus it is, in the sky, a semicircle of various colours, which appears in showery weather. It is gendered by the sunbeams on a cloud. When there is a moist and dark cloud opposite the orb of day, and disposed to receive and reflect his rays, the bow is seen; and never without this concurrence.

Secondly. Federally. The first time we read of it in the Book of Genesis, is in this covenant relation. "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you, and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." It was in being before. But now it was made a divinely constituted sign, or token. Thus it should lead us to think of the holiness and justice of God, in the destruction of the old world: and also of his forbearance and goodness, in engaging not to destroy it in like manner again; and in affording a sensible assurance of it. The appearance may be, in some measure, viewed as even typical of the event. The bow was early the principal weapon of war; and soon became the emblem of it. David says, "He hath bent his bow, and made ready his arrows upon the string, to shoot at the persecutors." But here is a bow without arrows, and without a string! When a man uses the bow in a hostile manner, the ends are towards himself; and the back is towards the enemy. But here the bow is reversed—the back is towards heaven; and the ends towards the earth. And therefore if it had arrows upon the string, they must be discharged upwards not downwards—the earth is safe, and has nothing to fear from it. If this should be thought more curious than wise; yet the bow thus viewed, if not a type, is a proof and a pledge. It says, the flood is gone—never to return! And here we feel a perfect certainty. However long or violently the rain falls, we are not alarmed. We look to the bow in the cloud; and are sure, that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." And why do we not feel equally sure, with regard to another interposition?

For thirdly. The bow is to be viewed evangelically. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Here we find God doing, in a nobler case, what he did after the deluge. Here we find him—with a better, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And to render the allusion similar, and to afford strong consolation to those who are fleeing for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, we have his oath, accompanied with a sign or token, that should subdue every apprehension. Where? What is it? "Upon the likeness of the throne," says Ezekiel, "was the likeness as *the appearance of a man above upon it.*" We know to whom this refers. "And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of *the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so* was the

appearance of the brightness round about. *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*"—An emblem of his glory, both as to his person, and importance. Who can help admiring the rainbow! It is one of the most *beautiful* appearances in Nature. How various the colours! Yet the celestial tints are united; and, though distinct, melt into each other, to make one astonishing whole. And his Name is Wonderful. What a combination of excellences is found in him—"He is altogether lovely." All human and divine beauties meet in him. All the charms of Nature, all the attractions of all creatures in earth and in heaven, are blended in him, and infinitely surpassed—"For how great is *his* goodness; and how great is his beauty!"

It also reminds us of his importance. He insures us safety—covenant safety. We are justified by his blood, and saved from wrath through him. He is the hope—the consolation of Israel. He that believeth on him cannot perish; but hath everlasting life.

Let us look to him, and be comforted, against every adverse threatening. Afflictions cannot overwhelm us. The Law cannot curse us. Enemies cannot injure us. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

JULY 20.

"*They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*"—Acts iv. 13.

This recognition is explained two ways. Some take it literally, as referring to the persons of the Apostles. These, their arraigners remembered, when they looked at them, for they had seen them before in company with him. And this, it is more than probable, was the case. For some of this very council attended his examination on the night of his apprehension. Yea, he was examined in the very house of this Caiaphas; and we are assured, that Peter, on the occasion, went into the High Priest's palace, to see the end. Jesus, also, had openly taught in the Temple, when, more than once, some of these men were present, disputing with him; and he was always accompanied by his disciples. No wonder, therefore, that Peter and John were recognized by them.—But others take it, in allusion to their qualities, behaviour, and mode of speaking: connecting it particularly with the former words. And "when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus:" remarking that they were of the same party; or, as we should say, of the same stamp. So the sentence has been commonly understood. And three remarks may be made upon it.

First. Some have been with Jesus. Peter and John had been, as to his bodily presence, with him, for several years, in public, and in private; going out and coming in with him. And who is not ready to envy them such intercourse? But he was received up into glory: and they who had known him after the flesh, knew him so no more. Yet he had promised his people his spiritual presence, to the end of the world. And thus, though now invisible, he is yet accessible. Hereafter they will be for ever with the Lord. But this heaven begins on earth. They were naturally without Christ; though not as to dispensation, yet as to experience. But their religion began with an introduction to *him*—They were made sensible of their need of him. They sought him: they found him. They had much to do with him then; and they have had much to do with him ever since. And they only go on well in religion, as they are able to say, "I am continually with thee." They are with him—in his word—in his house—at his table—with him in the closet—in the field—They are with him as pupils are with their teacher—as servants are with their master, waiting upon him all the day—as followers with their leader, willing to follow him whithersoever he goeth—as soldiers with their commander fighting the good fight of faith—For "they that be *with* him, are called, and chosen, and faithful"—And "he that is not *with* him, is against him."

Secondly. It is expected that they who are with him should resemble him. It is proverbially said, Tell me a man's company, and I will tell you his character. And it is well known, that like not only attracts, but begets like. Hence the importance we attach to the choice of associates. Hence we say to the unmarried—Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Hence to the young—He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. If we enter the house of mourning, we instantly catch the sympathy. The heart softens. The countenance contracts. The eye melts. How different are our sensations in the circle of festivity and mirth! It is said that those who live at court, have a manner of their own, which others cannot successfully put on.

All association, however limited, produces some influence. But the conformity will be in proportion—to the degree of the intimacy—and the constancy of the intercourse—and the love we have to the individual—and the veneration we feel for his greatness. Now all these will apply supremely to the Chris-

tian's acquaintance with Christ. And therefore the resemblance must be the greater—especially when we add to all this—That it is the duty, and the main business of his religion to imitate him—For he that saith, he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk as he walked. And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Thirdly. This conformity will not be overlooked. The Christian himself may not be sensible of it; for the more progress he makes in the divine life, the more humble will he be. Moses was not aware of the brilliancy of his face, when he came down from *being with God;* and was surprised to see the people dazzled at the glory of his countenance. And Paul said, I have not attained, I am not already perfect. But God will take knowledge of it. Angels will take knowledge of it. Ministers will take knowledge of it. His fellow-Christians will take knowledge of it. The world will take knowledge of it—his profiting will appear unto all men. And though the wicked cannot be pleased with it, yet they are aware of what, by their profession, Christians ought to be; and their consistency *will* enthrone them in their conviction, and put silence to their ignorance; and *may* constrain them to glorify God in the day of visitation.

If persons are seen firm in principle; fearless in duty; zealous in the cause of God; yet humble and lowly; and gentle and tender; and patient in suffering; and ready to forgive—no one need be told with whom *they* have been.

So, if you are proud, and vain, and worldly-minded, and avaricious, and revengeful, and censorious, and unkind; we do not require you to tell us with whom *you* are most intimate. And though we do not believe in witchcraft, we know that you have a familiar spirit; and we know who, and what, he is. And "glory not, and lie not, against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

JULY 21.

"*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*"
Psalm xxxiv. 8.

That God is good is too obvious to be denied: though, alas! we are so little affected with it. He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. As to *ourselves*, he made us. He placed us so high in the scale of beings. He furnished for our reception a world filled with his bounty and beauty. He gives the sweet interchange of hill and vale, and wood and lawn. He makes the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice; and, in the succession and produce of the seasons, he crowns the year with his goodness. He not only provides for our support, but for our comfort. He not only feeds and clothes, but feasts and adorns us. All our senses might have been so many inlets of pain, but they are the avenues of a thousand pleasures: and we are furnished with the most delightful colours, and sounds, and relishes, and perfumes. Our food might have been rendered distasteful; but He has made it pleasant; and connected gratification with the most necessary act of life. No one eats from a sense of duty, or to avoid death; but for pleasure.

Distinguished from this general kindness of God, there is, however, a peculiar goodness; and which regards us, as *sinners*. It is called in the Scriptures, mercy and grace. It led him to remember us in our low estate, and to make provision for our salvation from every effect of the Fall. He spared not his own Son. He delivered him for our offences, and raised him again for our justification. And in him all things are now ready for our acceptance. And in him, unworthy as we are, we may obtain all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, for ever. Herein is love! And this favour which he bears unto his people, and which regards the soul and eternity; this good will of him that dwelt in the bush is what we are supremely to seek after.

But what is the best way to know this goodness? David does not say, Hear, and know; read, and know; believe, and know—but, *Taste* and *see* that the Lord is good. That is, apply to him for yourselves, instead of relying on the authority of others; as in a case of disputed relish you determine not by testimony, but taste. In other words, it means experience. Experience is knowledge derived from experiment, in contradiction from theory. Since the mighty mind of Bacon beat down hypothesis, and introduced the inductive system, philosophy has reasoned from facts; and experimental philosophy has been much applauded. Why then should we ridicule experimental religion? Is there no standard in divinity to which we can appeal? Is there no test to be applied to the truth of pious pretensions? Are there no facts to bear out or to contradict what the Scripture says of sin? of repentance? of hope? of peace and joy in believing?

Some, and in our day many, know divine things in a way of speculation. But they are not under their operation: they feel not the powers of the world to come. And these are the most unlikely characters to be wrought upon. They are familiar with the truths of the Gospel; they admit all the preacher advances; they acknowledge all he proves: but

it has no influence over the heart and life. They believe in hell; but make no attempt to flee from the wrath to come. They believe in heaven; but do not set their affection on things above. They believe in the value of the soul, and that its redemption ceaseth for ever; and yet neglect the only opportunity to embrace the things that belong to their peace. They go through the Bible; but its threatenings do not alarm, and its promises do not allure them. They resist every motive. They have been wooed and awed a thousand times in vain. They see and approve better things, and follow worse. They are not happy, and contrive not to be miserable. They are in the jaws of death, and yet are at ease in Zion—What paradoxes! What contradictions are you! Of what worth is *your* knowledge? To know a refuge, and never enter it! To know a remedy, and never apply it! To know good, and never partake of it! This will not only leave you to perish, but deprive you of excuse; and aggravate your sin and condemnation. Like Uriah, with his fatal letter, you carry information that will place you in the front of the battle. Be not satisfied, therefore, till you know these things to purpose—which can only be by your knowing them experimentally.

Then your heart will be established with grace; and you will be so confirmed in the truth, that you will not be led away by the error of the wicked, to fall from your own steadfastness.

Then you will desire greater degrees of it; and having tasted that the Lord is gracious, your prayer will be, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."

Then you will be excited and qualified to address others. You will speak from the heart, and recommend a tried remedy—a remedy that has effectually cured yourselves. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is: hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

JULY 22.

"*To him that overcometh.*"—Rev. iii. 21.

THERE are seven addresses of this kind, closing the seven epistles, which John was to write, and send to the churches which were in Asia: to Ephesus, and Smyrna, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, and Sardis, and Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Overlooking what is peculiar to each of them, let us notice what is common to all. Four things are so.

First. All of them regard a particular character. It is a successful soldier—Him that *overcometh*. This reminds us of the nature of the Christian's life. It is a warfare. It was such, unquestionably, in the days of the Apostles. We read of their wrestling with principalities and powers: of their fighting the good fight of faith: of their resisting unto blood. If it be said, "The language is figurative;" we allow it. Yet it must, or we are trifled with, imply realities—And what *are* these? If it be said, "Religion is not the same thing now, as it was then;" we ask, when was it changed? And by whom? And what is it *at present?* What would be thought of a preacher, who should come forward in public and say, A religious life *was* a difficult thing once: but it is a very easy one now The first Christians were required, in order to be the disciples of Christ, to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him in the regeneration: but all this is dispensed with now! He may prophesy falsely—and the people may love to have it so: but what will be done in the end thereof? If, therefore, you think yourselves in the way everlasting, without knowing any thing of this spiritual warfare, you are in a pitiable condition: and pertain to the strong man armed, who keeps *his* palace and goods in peace.

Secondly. All of them are attached to an individual—Not to *them* that conquer; but to *—him* that overcometh. As much as to say—Each is perceived by me in the crowd: and if all in the Church should prove corrupt, and only one maintain his fidelity, faint, yet pursuing; let *him* not be ashamed or afraid. *He* shall be confessed before my Father and the holy angels. For *him* that honours me, I will honour.

Thirdly. All of them contain the *assurance of some reward* of grace. Such as the food of Paradise—a crown of life—the hidden manna, and the white stone—the morning star—white raiment—a pillar in the temple of God—a seat with the Saviour on his throne —But who can describe? or comprehend these remunerations? They are yet to be revealed. But we know enough of them to animate us in the conflict; and to convince us that godliness is profitable unto all things.

Fourthly. All represent the *Lord Jesus as the Author and Bestower* of every honour and indulgence. *I* will make; *I* will give; *I* will grant—says *He* who procured all for us; and in whom all the fulness dwells. The joy set before him, for which he endured the Cross, and despised the shame, was the gratification of his benevolence, in receiving gifts for men. And he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. *He* saves them spiritually now. *He* shall raise up their bodies at the last day. And *he* shall say to those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

He shall come to be glorified *in* his saints; and to be admired *in* all them that believe. Amen.

JULY 23.

"*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*"—Psalm lxxxvi. 5.

THE first word, "for," shows that the text

contains a reason for something; and it was this—as we see by the preceding verse: "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." We learn from it, of what importance it is, to place and keep the Supreme Being before the eye of the mind, in an amiable and inviting character, when we have to do with him. Tell me not there is danger in such representations: they may gender presumption. They may. Every thing is liable to abuse. But we are saved by hope. By withdrawing his confidence in God, man fell; and he can only be restored, by replacing it in him. The first step of a sinner, in returning to God, must result from this trust. Accordingly, the design of Revelation is to produce and support it. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The same is said of the mediation of Christ—"By him we believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God." More are destroyed by despair than by presumption. When once a man says, There is no hope, he becomes abandoned; and the despondence he feels is the strongest link in the chain that binds him to an unconverted state. Let there be, therefore, always a refuge open, and into which a sinner, when he looks back, and wishes to enter, may return. Tell him that yet there is room. Tell him that God is good; and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him.

And, from hence, let me also learn, that—when we have no comfort arising from personal assurance, there is encouragement enough in the general views which the Scripture gives us of God to induce us to wait on the Lord, and keep his way. David does not, here, say, I will lift up my soul to Him, for he is *my* God, and he has given me the heritage of them that fear his Name; but he looks to his goodness, and readiness to forgive, and the plenteousness and impartiality of his mercy. These considerations do not require me to ascertain, before I come to him, that I am a saint; but tell me to come, as a sinner; and assure me, that he will in no wise cast me out. When I know not that I *have* grace, how delightful is it to know that it is attainable; and to hear a voice, saying, Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely! Thus Mr. Scott said, when dying, that those Scriptures refreshed and comforted him most, which were not limited to a particular class, but open to all.

Yet, however good, and forgiving, and merciful, He is—this is nothing to those who refuse or neglect to "call upon him." Such blessed assurances are not intended to make us careless; but to excite and animate our applications to him. Prayer is the way in which he, who has a right to determine, and who cannot err, has chosen, for our obtaining his favours—Yet I will be inquired of. Ask and ye shall have. Seek, and ye shall find.

Those, therefore, that live without prayer, are shut out from the blessedness. But this is not all. They incur, also, the curse which results from the contempt of his grace. There is no aggravation of misery like the consciousness of patience exhausted, kindness abused, opportunity lost. But lost entirely by our own fault! Lost for ever! *This* conviction will be the food of the worm that never dies, and the fuel of the fire that never shall be quenched.

JULY 24.

"*Prove me now.*"—Mal. iii. 10.

THERE is nothing of which men are more tenacious, than the honour of their veracity. How offended do they feel, if we seem to suspect the truth of their word, by requiring a pledge or voucher, before we can venture upon it. If a king were to address his subjects in a way of privilege; and they should say, We must try thy faithfulness before we can trust it; he would consider himself insulted, and, in wrath, have nothing to do with them. God is veracity itself; and magnifies his Word above all his Name. And he might justly say to us—Such are my declarations—dishonour me not, by requiring any confirmation—I am entitled to implicit credence—and if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. But he knoweth our frame; and he knoweth the absolute importance of our confidence in him: and therefore he allows us to acquire it in our own way, and seems more concerned for our satisfaction, than for his own glory.

And yet hereby he glorifies himself too: for by this method he not only shows his kindness and condescension in accommodating himself to our infirmities; but obtains a sensible and satisfactory conviction in favour of his truth. In addition to testimony, we are furnished with experience. What we have read and heard, we have brought to trial, and have demonstrated ourselves. So that we do not merely believe. There must be, indeed, a degree of faith to induce us to make the trial; but when we have made it, and made it successfully, the proof increases the confidence of faith; and he that *thus* believeth hath the witness in himself.

Hence, when God invites us to prove him, it is not sinful to do it; yea, it would be sinful to refuse. We see this in the case of Ahaz. "Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." He did not decline it from confidence in God, or from humility,

out from desperation or indifference—"Not I—it is useless." Isaiah so understood it, as appears from his answer and complaint: "Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" When He allows a privilege, it becomes us gratefully to use it: we reflect upon his kindness and wisdom if we do not. Some, like Gallio, care for none of these things. They do not think religion or revelation worthy of proof. Hume said he had never read through the New Testament in his life! As much as to say, It is nothing to me, whether these things be true or false. I will take no pains to ascertain whether we have souls, as well as bodies; whether another world succeeds this; and whether, after death, there be a judgment.

There is, indeed, a censurable proving of God; and it is more than once charged upon the Jews of old. It was founded in unbelief, and led them to dare his judgments. Thus Pharaoh, and thus Adam and Eve, tried his word, in his threatenings. This is always wrong. First, because, if the trial proves the denunciation true, the proof is useless; for it is derived from the infliction of the evil itself: and we are not convinced by being punished. Secondly, we cannot put the menaces of God to the test, but by criminal conduct. It is only by sinning that we *can* try whether what he has *threatened* against sin will be accomplished, as the practice is the condition on which the penalty is suspended. But it is otherwise with the promises of God: if we find them true, we are saved and happy: and we can only seek the proof of their truth, in what is good and improving; in praying; in obedience; in the use of all the means which God has ordained.

Let us then prove him—and see whether his word will come to pass or not. Let us prove him with regard to the freeness of his mercy. For he hath said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Let us prove him with regard to the efficacy of his grace. For he hath said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Let us prove him with regard to the care of his Providence. For he hath said, "There is no want to them that fear him." "He careth for you." "The hairs of your head are all numbered." Let us prove him with regard to the advantage of benevolence. For he hath said, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Let us prove him with regard to the blessedness of his service. For he hath said, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." "There is no man, that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

By how many millions *has* all this been proved! His word *is* a tried word. And it has never failed in the trial. And never will fail.

Let us make the trial for ourselves, and set to *our* seal that God is true. Thus we shall become his witnesses to others, and be able to say, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

JULY 25.

"*For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*" Acts iii. 22, 23.

THERE was a remarkable resemblance between Moses and the Messiah, which it would be easy to trace. But the likeness here spoken of regards his office. Moses was a prophet; a peculiar prophet; a pre-eminent prophet. He introduced and established the whole of the Jewish dispensation with miracles, wonders, and signs. He was the mediator between God and the people. Other prophets received divine communications through various mediums; but he received every thing from God immediately. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold." But if "the Law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Yea, in all things he has the pre-eminence. Moses was faithful as a servant; but Christ as a Son over his own house. The commission of Moses was confined to one nation; Christ is not only the glory of his people Israel, but a light to lighten the Gentiles—the light of the world.

Every office the Saviour sustains requires a corresponding disposition in those to whom he is sent. As he is a prophet, we are commanded to "hear him." It cannot mean a mere hearing. Then many would be safe who are condemned already. But it includes

our believing his instructions with a faith unfeigned, and our cordial submission to them; or, as the Apostle expresses it, our obeying from the heart the form of doctrine delivered us. Blessed are they that hear the word of God and "keep it." If he commands us to lay up treasure in heaven; and we mind earthly things: if he tells us to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him; and we live to the lusts of men: if he says, Look unto me, and be ye saved; and we go about to establish our own righteousness: we do not hear him, but despise and reject him. He that hath his commandments, and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth him; and he it is that heareth him.

We are not only to hear him, but to hear him "in all things whatsoever he shall say unto us." Some dislike the mysterious parts of Christianity. Some, the humiliating. Some, the practical. But the only inquiry of a true disciple is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He will not dictate; he will not object; he will not prefer one thing to another, but say, "I esteem all thy commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." The test of real obedience is, to "do all things without murmurings and disputings."

Notwithstanding our duty and our responsibility, it is here supposed that some "will not hear this Prophet." This is a sad intimation: and we might wonder at the fact. But the depravity of human nature will account for it; and all history confirms it. Some ridicule and oppose. Many never attend the means of grace. Numbers have only "a form of godliness," while they deny the power thereof.

And to what are they exposed? "It shall come to pass, that every soul that will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Mark the impartiality of the sentence—"every soul." The refusers may be many; and they may differ from each other. But, though each may turn to his own way, all are going astray. There is only one path of life; but there are many avenues to death. And it matters not what our particular character is, whether profligate or formalist, Pharisee or hypocrite—*he* that believeth not shall be damned—and without holiness *no* man shall see the Lord.—See the nature of the doom—"shall be cut off." This is not correction, but excision. Not, however, annihilation; this would be a privilege. They shall seek death; but they shall not find it. In vain will they ask the rocks to fall on them, and the mountains to cover them. The penalty is not the loss of their being, but of their happiness and of their hope; the destruction of body and soul in hell for ever.—Observe the dreadfulness of the aggravation—'from among the people." They are intermixed now; and some of them very peculiarly. They attend in the same sanctuary; they live under the same roof; they are united by the ties of friendship and of blood. But their privileged situation and condition only evinced and increased their depravity. "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly; and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." Their present advantages, therefore, will afford them no security. Neither will they be able to *retain* them. The wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. Bu severed from the just, they will be led forth with the workers of iniquity; and carry away with them into the place of torment only the remembrance and the guilt of all they neglected and abused here.

"See, then, that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how much more shall not we escape, if we TURN AWAY FROM HIM THAT SPEAKETH FROM HEAVEN!"

JULY 26.

"*The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*"—Matt. xiii. 44.

How well may the Saviour call the Gospel a treasure! The tongue of an angel could not describe its value and preciousness. It meets and relieves every want of the soul. It blesses us with all spiritual blessings. It is the true riches. Unsearchable riches. Durable riches. It profits in the day of wrath. It delivers from death. It ennobles in the world to come.

A man may *find* a treasure hid in a field by accident, or by search. There is nothing casual in the salvation of a sinner, as to God: but as to *himself*, the event may be wholly undesigned and unlooked-for. He may have been seeking, but not for *this* object: Saul was searching when Samuel met him; but it was for his father's asses, and not for the kingdom. Thus the Lord is found of them that sought *him* not; and asked not for him. Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom when the Saviour said, Follow me. Saul was in a journey of iniquity when the Saviour appeared to him in the way, and called him by his grace. Some have gone to the house of God, from mere custom or curiosity, or a design to ridicule, but have returned to pray, and have said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? But, says Henry, Though he is sometimes found of them that seek him not, he is always found of them that seek him. This was the case with Cornelius. He was a devout man, and feared God, with all his house; praying and giving alms always, *when* Peter

was sent to tell him words by which he was to be saved. Nathanael had retired beneath the fig-tree to read, and reflect, and pray, *when* the Saviour took knowledge of him, and said, Thou shalt see greater things than these. And there are those now, who are awakened, rather than enlightened: they feel their spiritual wants, and are using the means of grace. And whatever ignorance or legality mixes with their efforts, they are in the search; and they shall find. He who has touched the heart, and turned it from the world, will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. Then *shall* we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.

The *emotions* of the finder are naturally pourtrayed. First, when he hath found the treasure, he hideth it. When we are anxious to secure a thing, we conceal it. The way, therefore, is here used for the end: and hiding refers not to secrecy, but safety. The allusion is to that holy jealousy recommended by the Apostle, when he says, Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it: looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God. To that trembling at God's word, when we are more affected with the inviting than with the awful parts. To that solicitude to obtain, which always genders apprehension. Oh! how shall I make all this my own! Oh! if I should miss it! What must I do to be saved!

Secondly. He feels joy thereof. Not that firm and glorious joy which arises in the established Christian, from a consciousness of possession, and who can say, I know that my Redeemer liveth: but the joy that results from the discovery of the reality, the excellency, the suitableness, the all-sufficiency, the attainableness, of the blessing; and is called, Rejoicing in hope. The patient, while the disease yet oppresses him, cannot feel at ease; but he is gladdened when he hears of the arrival of a physician, bringing with him a remedy that was never applied in vain.

Thirdly. He goeth—for now it is impossible for him, like many, to sit still—and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field. That is, he is fully determined to submit to the cost of procuring it, whatever it may be. We can offer no equivalency for the possession: nor is this the meaning of the word. In *this* way, were we to buy, it would be without money, and without price. But the meaning is simply *exchange;* as, in buying, we part with something to gain something. Hereby, we show our estimation: for what stronger proof can we give of our valuation of an object, than parting with all we have for the sake of it.

And the case here is such, that we *must* make a choice, and a sacrifice, to evince our preference, and attain our desire. Some things must be absolutely given up. Some, conditionally. And all, as to supreme regard and dependence. Are we willing, then, to part with our sins! All our sins! Even our bosom lusts? The right hand? The right eye?—Are we willing to part with our own wisdom? not leaning to our own understanding, but receiving the kingdom of God as little children, and becoming fools, that we may be wise? Are we willing to part with self-righteousness? not with the practice of obedience, morality, and good works; but only the substitution of them in the room of the Saviour; and reliance on them for our acceptance before God; and the pleading of them as a title to heaven—instead of saying, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. Are we willing to part with the world? The promises of superiors? The applause of companions? The smiles of friends? The ties of the dearest relations? For "he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me."

This is a hard saying. But every thing requires sacrifice, and every thing in proportion to the importance of the attainment. And, here, the prize is infinite. And we are more than indemnified for all we suffer or lose. "Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

JULY 27.

"*This grace wherein we stand.*"—Rom. v. 2.

What is this state? And what is this standing? The state, is a state of *grace*, and means the privileged condition in which all Christians are found, though they were by nature children of wrath, even as others. It is expressed, by our Apostle, in the preceding words; Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into *this* grace.

It may well be called this grace; for it only flows from, and only proclaims, the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us, by Christ Jesus. How dreadful is it to have God for our adversary!—He, in whom we live!—He, who is about our path, and our lying down!—He, on whose side all creatures rise up, and arrange themselves!—He, whose look is death, and whose frown is hell! What were our alarms when we began to discover our danger; and conscience induced us to cry, "What must I do to be saved!" And when we saw the storm passing off; when we were told that the dreadful breach was made up; when be believed that God was pacified towards us for all that we

had done—what were our feelings then—but life from the dead? And in that day we said, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."

But we may be reconciled to another, so as to be forgiven, and not be admitted into the intimacies of friendship. After Absalom was, through the intercession of Joab, allowed to return to Jerusalem, two years elapsed before he was allowed to see the King's face. But God favours us with the most familiar intercourse and communion. We come boldly to the Throne of Grace. In every thing, by prayer and supplication, we make known our requests. We dwell in his house. We eat at his table. We walk with God. We lean on his arm, and on his bosom. He honours us with his confidence, and trusts us with his secrets. He allows us to put him in remembrance, and plead with him, and say—can his condescension go further?—"Concerning the work of my hands, command ye me."

This Grace means, also, approbation and complacency. He takes pleasure in them that fear him. He rests in his love. He joys over them with singing. They are his children, his bride, his jewels, his glory. And as their persons, so their services are accepted in the Beloved. Poor as they are, he smiles upon them. Their prayer is his delight; and their alms are the odour of a sweet smell. He views their motive, and passes by their mistakes. He regards their wishes and design; and says, in their failures, "It is well that it was in thy heart."

Hence follows sympathy and compassion. What is done to them, he resents as a personal injury: for he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. In all their affliction, he is afflicted. Though he corrects them, it is for their profit. He takes the rod with reluctance, and he lays it aside with pleasure. He cannot withstand their yielding and their tears. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still—

> "So fathers their young sons chastise,
> With gentle hand, and melting eyes;
> The children weep beneath the smart,
> And move the pity of their heart."

In *this* grace they *stand*. Standing, here, intends firmness, stability, permanence. It is sometimes opposed to condemnation—If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall *stand?* To which we may answer, No one that appeals to his own obedience; but every one that is found in Christ. There is no condemnation to them that are in him. For *who* is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us—Hence, without presumption, they may exclaim,

> "Bold shall I stand in that great day;
> For who aught to my charge shall lay?
> While through his blood, absolved I am
> From sin's tremendous curse and shame!"

—Sometimes it is also opposed to defeat. Take to you the whole armour of God—that ye may *stand* in the evil day; and having done all, may *stand*. And of this they may be assured; for whatever disproportion there is between them and their enemies, the *worm* Jacob shall thresh the *mountains*. Some warriors have barely overcome; such another victory as they gained would have almost ruined them: but a Christian, having vanquished all his adversaries, stands with his feet on their necks; and is ready to engage as many more—Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

The more privileged any condition is, the more anxieties does it awaken. It is easy, therefore, to imagine what a Christian must feel, if he apprehended any uncertainty, as to the state he is in. But that state is as safe as it is blessed. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

> "Arise, my soul, my joyful powers,
> And triumph in my God:
> Awake, my voice, and loud proclaim
> His *glorious* grace abroad.
>
> "He raised me from the deeps of sin,
> The gates of gaping hell;
> And fix'd my standing more secure
> Than 'twas before I fell."

JULY 28.

"*Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*"—1 Chron. xvi. 10.

—And yet many believe, or pretend to believe, that religion is a joyless thing!

The *heart* has very little, if any, share in other enjoyments. Those delights only gratify the appetites, and strike the senses, and charm the imagination. But where is the heart? Even in laughter the *heart* is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. In religion, the heart finds relief, repose, satisfaction, joy.

"Yes, the heart of those who are fully assured of their condition; who have already attained, or have far advanced in the divine life." Nay—says the Prophet, Let the heart of them rejoice that *seek* the Lord. And there are three reasons to authorize it.

First. Because it is an evidence of grace. They may draw a conclusion against them

selves, and refuse to be comforted; but no man can seek to know and enjoy, and serve and resemble, God from mere nature. Actions may not indicate the state of the mind; but desires spring from it. We may be forced to do; but we cannot be compelled to prefer, and to choose.

Secondly. Because their success is sure. This is the case in no other pursuit. In the fields of worldly labour, we may spend our strength for nought, and in vain. A rival may bear off from us a prize, which we have long been chasing, and at the very moment we are seizing it. The cup of enjoyment, filled with eager hope, is often dashed to the ground from the very lip that touches it. But their heart *shall* live that seek God. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall *doubtless* return again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Is there unfaithfulness with God? Did he ever say to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain?

Thirdly. Because, when they *have* found, their aim and their wish in seeking are fully answered. All they can desire is treasured up in him: and they that seek the Lord shall not want *any* good thing. As to success in other cases, the wise man tells us, all is vanity and vexation of spirit: vexation, if we lose; and vanity, if we gain. To one of these alternatives we are inevitably subjected. We must be disappointed either in acquiring them —and this is often the case; or in possessing them—and this is always the case.

"In vain we seek a heaven below the sky;
The world has false but flattering charms:
Its distant joys show big in our esteem,
But lessen still as they draw near the eye:
In our embrace the visions die;
And when we grasp the airy forms,
We lose the pleasing dream."

But while every thing earthly falls short of hope, it is not possible to form an expectation adequate to the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints. What is it to have God himself for our portion and exceeding joy! To be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ! To realize a happiness, that solitude increases, that trouble improves, that death perfects! As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

While thus the heart of them that seek him should rejoice, the heart of others should be induced to seek him. At present, he is not far from any one of you. He is even inviting you to seek him. Yet a little while and it will be too late. Therefore, seek ye the Lord while he may be found; and call ye upon him while he is near.

JULY 29.

"*To whom he showed himself alive after his passion.*"—Acts i. 3.

How much will eternity reveal to our astonished minds! and, in reference to a thousand things, we may safely follow the advice of the Poet—

"Wait the great teacher, Death; and God adore."

The Scripture is given to establish our faith, and comfort our hearts, and sanctify our lives; but not to amuse us, and to gratify our curiosity.—Our Saviour rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven: but between these events there elapsed a considerable portion of time. During these intervening weeks, where was he? And how employed? One thing only we know—that he frequently showed himself to his disciples.

But what purposes were these intermediate appearances intended to answer? The Lord does not always give an account of any of his matters; and we ought to be peculiarly cautious in assigning reasons for *his* conduct who says, "My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts." We cannot, however, err in remarking,

—That they were the accomplishment of his word. He had said, "Ye now have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice; and your joy no man taketh from you." "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me." Now though these declarations extend to his final coming to judgment, and his advent in the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost; yet they more immediately insure his manifestation of himself between his resurrection and his glory. And if the disciples understood it not at the time, the meaning would be explained by the verification. And they would see how well they might in every other case rely upon his promise.

—They were also to convince them how fully he had forgiven them, and thus to gain the confidence of their hearts. For they had behaved very unworthily. After all he had done for them, and their own professions of attachment, when the hour of trial came, they all forsook him and fled. How much he felt their defection, we learn from his complaint, "I looked for some to take pity, and there was none; and for comforter, and I found none." And their own consciences upbraided and condemned them for their vileness. And therefore, had he gone away to heaven, and they had not seen him, they would have feared his resentment and displeasure. But he appeared to them again and again; and always with kindness in his looks, and peace on his lips; and at last, laying his hands on them, he was taken up to heaven in the very act of blessing them—thus

telling them that he had the same heart as ever, and was more than pacified towards them after all that they had done.

—They were also to evince the certainty of his resurrection. The importance of this event rendered it necessary that it should be placed beyond the possibility of all reasonable doubt. The disciples were not eagerly credulous of the fact, but slow of heart to believe; and their diffidence has been overruled to confirm our faith. For they required and obtained every kind and degree of proof. And these deponents were many. And were eye and ear witnesses. And even handled the Word of Life. And did eat and drink with him. And for a length of time. And in cases of a most peculiar nature. *They* could not, therefore, be mistaken: and *we* cannot be deceived. He is risen indeed! And therefore he is the Son of God. And we are not in our sins. The dead in Christ are not perished. And because he lives we shall live also.

—They were also to impart information on subjects not touched, or only hinted at, before; because the disciples were not able to bear them; and the proper hour was not yet come. And therefore the sacred historian says, that he not only showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, but also *spake* to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And this led them to think so differently of this kingdom from what they had done before, and to wait by prayer for its coming, in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But when he said, I am no more in this world: and, also, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world: and when he said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"—surely he intended a manifestation beyond his appearance, between his grave and his glory. And this we ourselves may hope to claim. But how is it that he will manifest himself unto us, and not unto the world? We disclaim all pretensions to personal manifestations. Some have contended for these; and, like Colonel Gardiner, have believed that they corporeally saw him. But surely, this was mistaking a lively impression on the mind for a reality. The case speaks for itself. Being embodied, he *could* render himself visible; but then it would be a true representation; we should see him as *he is*. And, accordingly, Saul saw him, when he appeared to him in his way to Damascus, with a body glorious above the brightness of the sun. But these good people always see him as he is not—they always see him bleeding on the cross—but he is not there—he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. We need no sensible appearance.

—But there is a spiritual manifestation absolutely necessary. Paul experienced this, or the outward vision would have been of little avail: "It pleased God," says he, "to reveal his Son in me." And our Saviour himself said, He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life. It is a perception, by faith, of his glory, so as to induce us to love him, and trust in him, and follow him.

—There are also special manifestations of himself (we mean as to clearness and enjoyment) occasionally experienced by his people; and which excite them to exclaim, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." These are not their food, but cordials. They are regulated by their condition and exigences. But though they are limited, as to number and degree, they are most desirable and valuable. They make us better acquainted with heaven than all the descriptions contained in sermons and books. And they make us long after a state, in which his servants shall serve Him; and they shall see his face—"And so shall they be for ever with the Lord."

JULY 30.

"This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."—John xxi. 14.

Not the third time in succession—for he had appeared before this to the women, and to Cephas, and to James, and to the two disciples going to Emmaus. But the third time in kind: that is, the third time when the disciples were together.

—"And on this wise showed he himself." The *place* was, "the sea of Tiberias"—called also, the lake of Gennesaret, and the lake of Galilee. Who would not like to visit this sea, whose surface and whose shores so often felt the presence, and witnessed the miracles of the Son of God?

—The favoured *party* were, "Simon Peter, and Thomas, called Didymus"—he had lost much by his absence before, but now he keeps close to his brethren—"and Nathanael, of Cana in Galilee"—we thought well of him from the beginning; for though at first he had some infirmities, he was open to conviction, and loved retirement; and he who saw him under the fig-tree, assured him that he should see greater things than these—"and the sons of Zebedee"—John and James—"and two other of his disciples" who are not named But it may be asked, How came the disciples here, seeing when he rose from the dead, they were, unless, perhaps, Nathanael, at Jerusalem? The Saviour had said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when ye shall be scattered every one to his own;" and it is said,

"Then the disciples went away again unto their own home"—This was the effect of fear. But though fear made them flee, yet their repairing down into *Galilee* was enjoined them by the angel, who appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. And Jesus himself had said, before his death, "After I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee." They believed his word, and obeyed; and he was faithful that had promised.

—But how did he find them *engaged?* "Simon Peter," who had a house of his own, and perhaps had retained the implements of his business, "saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee." This was not, as some imagine, blameable; as if they ought to have remained fasting and praying; or as if this exertion was the effect of despondency, with regard to his appearance, and his care to provide for them. They acted commendably. It showed their humility—that, though advanced, they were not elated, nor ashamed of their former engagement; and their wish—not to be burdensome to any; if they could supply their own wants, and with quietness work, and eat their own bread; and also their diligence—in redeeming their time, and not waiting for him in idleness. And he appeared to them, though not engaged in a religious exercise, but in a secular, honest calling; as the angels had appeared to the shepherds, when keeping their flocks by night. And if he came to any of us, by death, how much better would it be for him to find us active, in fulfilling the duties of a useful station, than telling our beads, or kneeling before a skull, or a crucifixion, in a cell! When Elijah was consciously waiting for the chariot that was to carry him to heaven, what did he? Retire to fast and pray! No; but he continued talking with his pupil and successor, for his improvement—determined to be useful to the last, and to live, as long as he breathed—And blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

—But "that night they caught nothing." Though, in an ordinary way, the hand of the diligent maketh rich, yet this rule has its exceptions. These should be sufficient to teach us, that the blessing of the Lord, *it* maketh rich; and that, except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Men, and even good men, may for awhile be baffled in their efforts; to teach them the lesson of dependence upon Providence; and to keep them, when success cometh, from sacrificing to their own net, and burning incense to their own drag, as if by these their portion had been made plenteous.

—He loves to astonish, as well as relieve, his people; he therefore often delays his appearance, till our hopelessness has prepared us for the display of his glory to the greatest advantage. Weeping may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning—"When the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore." But they "knew not that it was Jesus"—supposing him to be some common person, waiting their coming ashore, to purchase what they had caught. And this was the meaning of the question, "Children, have ye any meat?"—that is, Have you succeeded in fishing? And have you any provision to dispose of?—Upon their answering, No; he showed his omniscience. He saw where a shoal was approaching the boat, and ordered them to "cast the net on the right side of the ship," assuring them, that they should find. They did so—and who ever lost by obeying him? So signal was their success, that they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes!

—Thus good men sometimes see their affairs, after many a fruitless struggle, taking a favourable turn, and succeeding beyond their expectation. At evening tide it shall be light. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."—We shall look at this narrative again.

JULY 31.

"*And on this wise showed he himself.*"
John xxi. 1.

—We have traced this appearance down to the moment when the disciples ascertained who he was. John recognized him first; reminded as it would appear, by a former miracle of the same kind; and on the performance of which, Peter had exclaimed, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Yet Peter was not at present struck with the recollection himself. But no sooner does John say to him, "It is the Lord," than the ship can hold him no longer; but, girding himself with his fisher's coat, he plunges into the sea to reach him! What rashness! What zeal! How perfectly in character does this man always appear! He was fervent, but acted by feeling, rather than reflection. He had a warm heart. The Lord had lately turned and looked upon him in the judgment-hall, and he went out and wept bitterly. He had had much forgiven; and he loved much. The Saviour had more than pardoned his late sad conduct; and had sent a message to him distinctively, "Go, tell my disciples, and Peter!" And how could he love him enough? And love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it.

—The rest of the disciples followed slowly, but surely, dragging the net. Had all done like Peter, the fish had been abandoned, and the vessel left to be drifted and injured. While we admire some, we must no con-

demn others. The dispositions and the duties of men are various: and while some perform splendid actions, and excite notice, others go ploddingly on in the sober discharge of their common calling—But they also have the testimony that they please God.

—What did they find when they came to land? "A fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread." This was to show that he cared for them; that they should be furnished, not only with grace sufficient for them, but with food convenient for them; and that verily they should be fed. He had reminded them of this on a former occasion. When he sent them forth on their missionary excursion unprovided, they had misgivings how they were to be supplied—though they were ashamed to make known their fears; but he who employed them was bound to maintain them—and when they returned, he said, When I sent you forth without purse and scrip, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him! The young lions do lack and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." You serve a kind master, and the world is his, and the fulness thereof—Jehovah-jireh!—But we read, "Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hand;" and nothing has such a peculiar relish as what is gained by the blessing of God upon our own endeavours. He therefore also said unto them, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." And thus, while they must have marvelled and adored at what was nothing less than a miracle, they were not only supplied for their immediate use; but the sale of the capture would pay their expenses back to Jerusalem, and while waiting there for the promise of the Father.

—Filled with reverence and awe, they seemed reserved, and disposed to keep back—He therefore invited them—"*Come* and dine. And none of his disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord." But still keeping back: "Jesus then *cometh*" to them, "and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise." The meat was ordinary, and coarsely dressed: but it was wholesome; and the appetite of labour made it welcome. We do not live to eat, but eat to live. Nature wants little, and grace less. Luther often dined upon a herring; and Junius, on an egg. If it be, as is said, beneath a philosopher to be nice and finical in his food, how much more is it so in a Christian! in a minister! Jesus censured Martha and commended Mary. The table *He* spreads for us is frugal and simple—It is the world, the flesh, the devil, disease, and death, bring in the rest. No mention is made of his blessing the repast; but there is no doubt but he did—It was his constant usage—to teach us to be religious in our common actions, and that man liveth, not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

But did he actually partake of the provision himself!—What says Peter! "He showed him openly not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink *with him* after he rose from the dead." Did he rise with the same body that died? "Behold," said he, "my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Did his body undergo any change before his ascension? Will things in a future state be possible that are not necessary? We know but in part. And the sacred writers prophesy but in part.

But "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."—Let me be one of the number to whom he shall say, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

AUGUST 1.

"*So when they had dined.*"—John xxi. 18.

They did not, we presume, continue long at table. Table, indeed, they had none. The place was the seaside. The viands, bread and fish. The fare, dressed and served coarsely. Yet part of it was miraculously provided before they landed; and part of it supplied from the wonderful capture they had just made—Here were seven Apostles—and the Lord of angels. Who, then, would not have been at the homely meal? Who, having any piety, or wisdom, would not have preferred the entertainment—thus dignified—however humble—to the sumptuous feast of Belshazzar, or Ahasuerus? Where there is much provision for the flesh, there is commonly little repast for the mind. And this is found *after* the meal. It has often been lamented, that the best part of society should be expected to withdraw, as soon as dinner is ended: but females may be assured, that, with few exceptions, they sustain no loss by their removal.

But here, when they had dined, discourse followed, which had been deemed worthy the page of inspiration; and was written for our learning and admonition. It commenced with an inquiry. "Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him again the second time, Simon, son of

Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me! And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

The question was put to Peter, because of his late conduct. Instead, therefore, of showing any pre-eminence in him, it implied his fall, and tended to his humiliation. This, and this alone, was the reason why our Lord thus freely, yet tenderly, addressed *him* in the presence of his brethren—It was necessary both for *his* sake and for *their* sakes.

The question was first put comparatively —"Lovest thou me *more than these?*" There is something ambiguous and equivocal in the expression. Did our Lord, by *these*, refer to the fish, the nets, the boat, his present occupation and profit? Doddridge says this is a forced and frigid sense. But this does not appear. By this calling, Peter had gained his subsistence—he might naturally be attached to it—and feel a degree of reluctance at leaving it, without any other means of support in view—and, as our Lord would be freely served, he inquires whether Peter was willing to resign all—and go a fishing no more—and be wholly engaged in his service. —Or did he point to the rest of the disciples, when he said, Lovest thou me more than *these?*—That is, more than these thy brethren love me? To this, Whitby objects; because it would be impossible for Peter to answer such an inquiry; as he could not know the hearts of others, and compare them with his own. But the question refers not to Peter's *knowledge* but to his *opinion*. He had already expressed a degree of self-preference, as well as self-confidence, when he said, "Though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended"—and he had now *done* more than the other disciples, in swimming to shore, to reach him first—"Am I, then," says Jesus, "to suppose that thou lovest me more than *these?* Peter's reply shows his improvement. "I have done with judging others—and I say nothing of the *degree* of my love—but thou knowest the *reality*."

It was *thrice* renewed. Thrice is used as a kind of perfect number. In Peter's vision, the thing was done thrice, to render it the more observable. There is little doubt, however, that our Saviour alluded to the repetition of his offence—and the forewarning he had received—"Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me *thrice*."

Peter, when asked the question the third time, was *grieved*—This grief was not anger at the Saviour's conduct; but pain, to think he had rendered his love to so dear a Master suspicious; and fear, also—as he knew he never spoke in vain—that there was a cause for this additional inquiry, and that it intimated an apprehension of some fresh peril. This sensibility showed a good frame of mind.

To *all* the inquiries he replies without a moment's hesitation, and addresses himself, in *each* instance, to the Saviour's own knowledge, with an additional force in the last appeal—"'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee'—I do not say, I shall never yield to temptation again—Lord, preserve me!—And I wonder not that those who can only judge from outward appearance, think unfavourably of me, after all that I have done. But thou seest the heart." We ought to stand clear with men; but it is a peculiar satisfaction, when we are misjudged of our fellow-creatures, to know that our witness is in heaven, and our record is on high.

After every answer, our Lord commands him to feed his lambs, and his sheep. Here, again, a desperate cause wants to find a proof of Peter's supremacy. But he is not told to lord it over all the other *shepherds*, but to do the work of a *pastor* himself—the very same thing which Peter, too, himself enjoins upon others—"Feed the flock of God that is among you." Yea, instead of his being exalted above his brethren, he is again reproved and abased. *They* had not forfeited their charge; but he had; and it was necessary to renew it. And, therefore, now he is re-converted, he is re-commissioned. If a servant had offended and forfeited his place, it would not be enough for the master to say, I forgive thee, but I can no more trust thee, or employ thee. Nothing would be deemed a full restoration but re-employment.

Two things may be observed here. First, the difference there is among the Lord's people. There are not only sheep, but lambs—These mean new converts and weak believers. These are not to be disregarded. *He* does not despise the day of small things—and he tells those who are strong, to bear the infirmities of the weak. Secondly, we see what the Lord requires, as the principle of his service—"If you love me, Peter, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. I wish you to do nothing for me, unless you do it from love. This alone will render your work your delight; and carry you through all your difficulties—Love is strong as death." And while he requires the love, as the principle of the service; he requires the service, as the proof of the love. "You cannot show your love to me personally; show it relatively. I have a cause—endeavour to promote it. I have followers—aid them—and inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye shall do it unto me."

This love, O my soul, is the grand thing! Without it, whatever be my religious pretensions, I am nothing. Let me put my name

in the place of Peter's; and suppose the Lord Jesus asking me this question—Dost *thou* love me?

> "Lord, it is my chief complaint,
> That my love is weak and faint:
> Yet I love thee, and adore;
> O for grace to love Thee more!"

AUGUST 2.

"*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.*"—John xxi. 18, 19.

This was another part of his discourse, "when they had dined." He had enjoined Peter his doing work, and now he appoints him his suffering work. In such a world as this, doing well and bearing ill are commonly connected. In the first days of Christianity they were inseparable.

The representation may be applied to the difference there is between youth and age. The glory of young men is their strength. They can gird themselves; and go, with ease and speed, whither they would. And let them use well their powers and opportunities. Let them be active and useful, and prepared for the future. Other days will come; and when they shall be old, they shall stretch forth their hands, and another shall gird them, and carry them whither they would not. Then they will be helpless and dependent. People long for age: but what is it but longing for days in which we have no pleasure; when we shall be dim-sighted; and hard of hearing; and tremblings will come upon us; and the grasshopper will be a burden; and desire fail! These are the effects of the state: and if by reason of strength our years are threescore and ten, yet is their strength labour and sorrow. Let us secure succour against such a period. It is said, an old man has no friend but his money. But if we are kind, and live not to ourselves, we shall not want those who will rock the cradle of our age. And, above all, God will be our comfort and strength; and bear and carry us; and gently take us to himself; where our youth shall be renewed like the eagle's, and mortality swallowed up of life.

But our Lord, we are assured, designed to intimate, that after Peter had served him as an Apostle, he was to honour him as a martyr—"signifying by what death he should glorify God." Thus,

First. Our Lord foresaw Peter's sufferings, and the manner in which he was to finish his course. And he foresees all that shall befall each of us. We know not what a day may bring forth. But nothing is left to chance. No event will turn up that is new to him; and for which he has not provided.

Secondly. Peter was not to die till he should be old. Very good and useful men have been removed in the midst of life; and this is one of the most mysterious dispensations of Providence. But this is not always the case. Religion conduces to health and longevity. Many of God's most eminent servants have "filled their days," and come to the grave in a good old age, like a shock of corn fully ripe, in its season. And the hoary head is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness. Such a man is not only a kind of physical wonder—that he should have been preserved so long with such a feeble frame, and exposed to so many outward dangers: but a moral wonder—that with such a heart, and in such a world, he should have held on his way, and kept his garments clean, and have been without offence. He is a monument to the glory of divine grace.

Thirdly. He was to die by crucifixion. This is the meaning of his "stretching forth his hands, and being girded, and carried whither he would not"—That is, his arms would be extended on a cross, and he would be bound, to be led to a death of violence, not agreeable to his feelings, and at which nature would revolt. For religion does not divest us of humanity; an aversion to pain is not inconsistent with submission to the will of God; we may love the result of death, and shudder at the passage. Paul wished not to be unclothed, but clothed upon: and Jesus himself, with strong cryings and tears, said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Peter would, and would not; there would be nature in him, as well as grace. And while the spirit would be willing, the flesh would be weak. We see this related of some of the martyrs. Latimer, in one of his letters in prison, says to his friend—"O! pray for me! I sometimes shudder, and could creep into a mouse-hole; and then the Lord visits me again with his comforts; and thus, by his coming and going, shows me my infirmity." Ridley, at the stake, said to the smith that was driving in the staple, "Knock it in hard, my good fellow; for the flesh may have its freaks." And when they were leading Rawlins along to the flames, chancing to see his wife and children among the crowd, he burst into a flood of tears, and striking his breast, he exclaimed, "Ah! flesh, you would have your way; but I tell thee, by the grace of God, thou shalt not gain the victory."

Lastly. His death was to issue in the Divine glory. Persecution has always been overruled to advance the cause it aimed to destroy. The wrath of man has praised God. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the churches. The death of such men has been honourable to the truth and grace of the Gospel. It has awakened attention, and in-

duced inquiry; and by displaying the temper and supports of the sufferers, such impressions have been made upon the spectators, that, before the ashes were extinguished, others were ready to be baptized for the dead.

We are not martyrs. But we are often called to suffer; and we may glorify God in the fires. There is only one way into the world; but there are many ways out. By which of these we are to pass we know not. But we may glorify God by the death we shall die—if we are enabled to exercise faith, patience, and repentance: if the joy of the Lord is our strength; and we can, from experience, recommend his service.

For this we should be concerned. But for this we presume many would desire to die, "softly, suddenly, and alone"—Yet what they should choose, they wot not. They therefore leave all with their heavenly Father—only praying that Christ may be magnified in their body, whether it be by life or by death.

AUGUST 3.

"*And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*" John xxi. 19—22.

This is another part of the discourse "when they had dined." It is the reproof of Peter, who, though recovered from his fall, and recommissioned to his office, was not faultless—Who can understand his errors?

The case was this. As soon as our Lord had tried Peter's love, and predicted his death, he said unto him, "Follow me." This is to be taken literally: for though it might be intended as a symbol, yet he now arose from his seat, and, walking away from the company, he told Peter to come after him—probably wishing to have some communication with him apart. Peter obeyed. But John, seeing this, and fearing that our Lord was departing, and would take Peter along with him, could not remain where he was; and so he followed them; silent and anxious, and, perhaps, weeping. Peter, turning round, sees him: and asks, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" It is probable this arose partly from an affectionate concern for his companion; and, considering the peculiar friendship there was between them, we might have considered the question as excusable, if not even laudable.

But we are sure it was wrong in the motive. Peter, instead of being satisfied with a knowledge of his own duty and destiny, and praying to be able to perform the one, and endure the other; wishes to pry into John's future circumstances, and to know what was to become of him; whether *he* also should suffer; and what death *he* should die. This, in the view of him who reproved not according to the hearing of the ear, involved in it an improper curiosity—a principle, when indulged, always the most unprofitable in itself, and often the most rude in its exercise, and injurious in its effects. Our Lord always discouraged it; and therefore he here rebukes Peter in these memorable words—"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me"—as I have commanded thee. How many things engage our time and attention which do not concern us! How often do we turn from what is plain and important; and perplex or amuse ourselves with what is too distant for us to reach; too deep for us to fathom; too complicated for us to unravel; or too trifling to merit regard! When poring over the future state of the heathen, and the destiny of idiots, and the decrees of God, and the union of fore-knowledge and free-agency, and the fulfilment of prophecy; is not the Saviour asking, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law."

Our present knowledge is proportioned to our present state. More information upon certain subjects would now injure, rather than improve, by multiplying our diversions, and drawing us more off from the one thing needful. We are now in a state of action and preparation. Let us leave the knowledge that is too wonderful for us. A day-labourer will gain more of it in a moment after he enters heaven, than any philosopher or divine can acquire by the toil of a whole life on earth. Let us wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore—Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

But what have we to *do?* Follow thou me. Lord help me to follow thee as thy disciple and thy servant—immediately, without delay—freely, without constraint—fully, without reserve—and constantly, without change, or—a shadow of turning!

AUGUST 4.

"*Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto them, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*"—John xxi. 23.

What did he mean by his coming to John? It may be understood three ways.

—Of his coming by a natural death; and he was the only apostle who did not suffer a violent end.

—Of his coming to destroy Jerusalem; and he survived that event.

—Of his coming at the last day; in which case he answers Peter, by the supposition of a miracle—"What if I choose that he should continue on earth till I come to judge the world?" In this sense it was taken.

But observe how it was mis-reported. Jesus only supposed a case; and it was turned into an assertion. He only said, What *if* I will that he tarry till I come; and it was circulated that he *should* so tarry—and the saying went abroad among the brethren that he should not die. Who has not heard the absurd story of the wandering Jew? Whether any now believe such a delusion, we know not: but we see what influence the notion had in the early ages. Beza mentions an impostor in his time, at Paris, who gave out that he was the deathless John, and was burnt at Toulouse.

But see how ready people are to credit things strange and wonderful—O that they were equally ready to receive the witness of God!

How many mistakes have arisen from deviating by little and little from the language of Revelation. Many errors might be prevented, and many rectified, if we could bring the parties to the *very* words the Holy Ghost useth. Let us distinguish between Divine truth, and men's explanations of it. Let us not take up with the statements of Calvin, or Arminius, or any other reporter, while we can go to the Scripture itself. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

But let us make a moral use of this misrepresentation, and learn the importance of accuracy in our statements. It is owing to the neglect of this that there is so much *circumstantial falsehood.* We refer to the relations of facts, true in substance, but false in circumstances. Some seldom ever apprehend things distinctly; and how can they report them accurately? Some have memories that rarely retain perfectly what they hear. Some are careless. Some mind not morally what they say. Some are full of eagerness and feeling: and love to excite—and for this purpose they love to enlarge and enhance. From one cause or another, many, who would shrink back from a direct lie, occasion deception by those omissions or additions which can give an erroneous turn or effect to the case spoken of. By this means, what aid is given to slander, and what injury is often done to character, where there is no risk on the one side, and no redress on the other!

Look at the text, and see what consequences may result from the substitution of a *shall*, for an *if:* and always make conscience of your speech. Distinguish things that differ. What you know as probable, state as probable; and state as certain, only what you know to be certain. As a good remedy for this, and every other evil of the tongue—Let us be swift to hear, but slow to speak—Let us remember, that in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin—Let us believe, that by our words we are to be justified or condemned—Let us keep our hearts with all diligence; for out of them are the issues of life—Let us pray—Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.

AUGUST 5.

"*Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.*"
Joel iii. 13.

The season renders the language interesting; and we may consider the words, literally, as an address to husbandmen.

The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. He casts the seed into the ground, where it seems lost. For awhile, he sees nothing to reward his labour and expense: for that which he soweth is not quickened except it die. But it soon rises from the dead: and he perceives the blade, gently rising through the earth. Then comes winter. The wind howls over it; the frost bends and binds it; the snow covers and oppresses it. But it weathers all. The spring arrives. The stalk shoots up. The ear appears, and the full corn in the ear. The crop ripens; and the golden harvest waves its treasures; and calls for the reaper to fill his hand, and he that bindeth sheaves, his bosom. The husbandman may think little or nothing of God—unless he wants fine weather; but it is *He* that worketh all in all. Whatever interventions there may be, *He* is the first cause: "I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

And herein we see the power of God. The spectators wondered when five loaves were multiplied into a sufficiency for more than five thousand consumers. Why are not we struck, when we see the grain in the earth annually increasing thirty, sixty, an hundred fold? It is the commonness of the effect that prevents our astonishment. The only difference in the cases is, that in one instance the operation is sudden; in the other, it is slow: but this magnifies the agency, instead of detracting from it.

And here we see the truth of God. When Noah and his family left the Ark, and saw the new world, every appearance of cloud awakened their fears; and God, to tranquillize them, said, "I will not again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and

harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." And every time the sickle is put in, he tells us that he is a faithful God, and that we may always rely upon his word.

Here we behold his goodness. For *whom* does he thus constantly and plenteously provide; but an unworthy, guilty, ungrateful world; who will overlook his kindness, and abuse his benefits, and turn his gifts into weapons of rebellion against him! Were he to deal with them after their desert, or reward them according to their iniquities, the heavens over us would be brass, and the earth iron; the grain would perish in wetness, or be burnt up with drought; and we should have cleanness of teeth in all our dwellings; and while the children cried for bread, the mother would have none to give them.

Here we also trace the wisdom of God. For though all things are of God, he does not encourage sloth. Our activity is as necessary as our dependence. Though there is a part we cannot do, there is a part we can do; and if this be neglected, God will do nothing. We cannot furnish the soil; but we must manure it. We cannot produce the seed; but we must sow it. We cannot ripen the field; but we must reap it. "What thou givest them, that they gather."

Let us be thankful that another of these pleasing and instructive periods has arrived. And while we see the valleys standing thick with corn, and hear the little hills rejoicing on every side; let us pray for the appointed weeks of harvest.

—And, remembering another, and an infinitely more important opportunity, may we give all diligence, while it continues, to secure its blessings; lest, in the anguish of disappointment, and the remorse of despair, we are forced to exclaim; "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not SAVED." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."—Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

AUGUST 6.

"*Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.*"
Joel iii. 13.

WE have taken these words literally; let us now view them metaphorically. We have heard them addressed to the husbandman. Let us now consider them as addressed—

—First, to the ministers of the word. That we are allowed such an application is obvious. Our Lord said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." By harvest, he intends means of usefulness and opportunities: by labourers, those whose office is to endeavour to make use of them. So again: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Here he refers to the season of doing good to the Samaritans, which he was now improving; for, in consequence of the testimony of the woman, many of them were eager to hear, and were coming over the plain. The case is, when the grain is ripe, if it be not gathered in, it is liable to perish. The season for saving it is short and uncertain. Men, therefore, forego ease, and endure fatigue to secure it. Yet what is the safety of the grain, to the salvation of souls! How many are destroyed for lack of knowledge! But the period is favourable for informing them. We have religious freedom; and our exertions are unimpeded. None makes us afraid. We have the Scriptures in full circulation. The rising generation are taught to read. Religious parties excite and emulate each other. Prejudices are wearing away. Persons are willing to hear. And not preachers only, but parents, masters, neighbours, Christians at large—all, in doing good, have the finest opportunities, if they will seize them; and the loudest calls, if they will obey them—But the space for all this will not, cannot continue—Therefore, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Secondly, as addressed to public judgments. Thus we are principally to understand the passage before us. The people spoken of, were ripe for ruin: God therefore calls for the executioners of his wrath to cut them down. Thus it was with the people of Canaan, when their iniquity was full; and Joshua and his army were the reapers. Thus it was with the Jews themselves: and Nebuchadnezzer was called in to punish them; and afterwards the Romans to destroy them. Thus it has been with many nations since. And thus it has been with many a community, even in our own times. The work was soon done; for the reapers were the Lord's; and the fields were fully ripe.—Are we in danger? We have reason for apprehension, if we estimate our condition by our guilt, and our guilt by our privileges. Let us not be highminded, but fear. God can never be at a loss for instruments. He can mingle a perverse spirit in the midst of us. He can take wisdom from the prudent, and courage from the brave. Hearts, events, elements, are all his. He has a controversy with us; and, by menacing dispensations, seems to say aloud, Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? But these threatenings are mercifully conditional. "At what instant I shall speak con

cerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." May we hear, and fear, and turn unto the Lord—and he will leave a blessing behind him, that we perish not.

Thirdly, as addressed to the messengers of death: accidents, diseases, whatever can bring us to the grave. This regards us individually. Whatever be the destiny of the nations, we know our own destiny: old or young, rich or poor, it is appointed unto us once to die—This is the way of all the earth.—But when are people ripe for this removal hence?

It is certain that sin ripens the transgressor for hell. But *when* he is ripe, it is not easy to decide. The most grossly and openly vicious are not always the most guilty before God. We see a profligate wretch, and deem him ripe for ruin; and wonder *he* is not cut down—when, perhaps, though not immoral, we ourselves are much more criminal in the sight of Him who judgeth righteously. He, perhaps, never had our advantages; and was pressed by severer temptations than we ever knew. If asked, therefore, *when* a man is ripe for destruction, we acknowledge we cannot determine. But it must be wise to beware; and to keep from every approximation to such a dreadful state. Surely when a man is insensible under the word; and incorrigible under the rebukes of Providence; and his conscience ceases to reprove; and he can turn divine things into ridicule; he must be, as the Apostle says, "nigh unto cursing."

Holiness ripens the saint for glory. But here, again, when he is matured and made meet for it, we cannot ascertain. Actions strike us; but some have few opportunities for exertions; and yet they have much of the life of God in their souls. We should think favourably of a man, in proportion as he was dissatisfied with himself; and esteemed the Lord Jesus; and relied upon him; and was anxious to resemble him; and acknowledge God in all his ways. However, the Lord knoweth them that are his, and them that are not his; and he chooses the most proper time to remove them; the wheat for the barn, and the chaff for the burning. But the end of all things is at hand. And,

Fourthly, God thus addresses his angels at the last day. When this mandate will be given, is uncertain. But we are as sure of the event, as we are ignorant of the period. And then shall the Son of man come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Then cometh the end. Then all will be ripe. His purposes will be accomplished. His promises and threatenings will be verified. Time itself will be no longer. The earth will be cleared of all the produce; and the very fields in which it grew will be destroyed. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"—

Let him hear *this*. How many things are continually said! And how are we to judge of them? One says, this is excellent; another, this is all-important. But if you would know what is the *real* value of these things, bring them to the *standard*—bring them to the *great day!* How do they abide *this* trial?

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." If you say, "All this is far off, and many things must be previously accomplished; remember, you cannot say this of death—There is but a step between you and death. How soon, therefore, may all the prophecies be fulfilled, and the world be at end, with you! And as death leaves you, judgment will find you. Many, who once had the warnings, are now in possession of the facts. Could we ask them—now they have entered the eternal world by death, and are waiting for the judgment to come—Is there one of them that would not bear his testimony to the importance of every Sabbath, and every sermon, with which you are favoured? Is there one of them that would say, "While I was living, the preacher was too close, and too alarming?" Rather would he not say, "Why was he not more in earnest?—And oh! wretch that I was, to disregard his voice—and come into this place of torment!"

AUGUST 7.

"*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*"—1 Cor. iv. 20.

Let us not abuse, but improve the important decision. It may be abused in two instances:

First. When it leads us to undervalue the outward institutions of piety, and the ordinary means of grace. Some would so refine religion as to make it unsuited to human beings. We have bodies as well as souls, and we are required to glorify God in the one as well as in the other. Our devotion is

indeed nothing unless we "lift up our hearts with our hands:" but bodily exercise need not be excluded in order to our worshipping in spirit and in truth.—There may be the form of godliness without the power: but, while we are here, the power cannot be displayed or maintained without the form. Enthusiasts may tell us, they never had so much religion as since they have given up what are called its ordinances; for now every day is a Sabbath, and every place a temple, and every voice a preacher. But they are not to be believed. Even all the private and practical duties of life are most fully and regularly discharged by those who wait upon God in his appointments. It is a dangerous delusion that leads people to the neglect of those means of grace which God, who knoweth our frame, has enjoined us to use; and to the use of which he has promised his blessing. In the New Jerusalem, John saw "no temple there:" but the experience of every Christian leads him, while he is here, to love the habitation of God's house, and to acknowledge that it is good for him to be there. The streams that will be needless when we reach the fountain-head, are valuable in the way. Our present aliments will be unnecessary hereafter; but what pretender would be so ethereal as to dispense with them now?

Secondly. When we are heedless of regulating the energy of our religion by the rule of the word. It is desirable to enlist the feelings on the side of truth and excellence. Impulse is useful and even necessary to exertion and success; but, in proportion to its force, it requires guidance, if not restraint. It is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing; but without knowledge, zeal may even in a good cause carry us astray; so that our good may be evil spoken of, and even produce evil. Something must be allowed for persons wanting in judgment; and for young converts, especially if they have been suddenly awakened. The novelty and the vividness of their views and impressions of eternal things may occasion some mistakes and improprieties in harmonizing religion properly with secular and relative life. But what we excuse we are not to commend. If one duty defrauds or kills another, it is a robber or a murderer. The wise man tells us every thing is beautiful in its season; and Paul enjoins us to do every thing decently and in order. But under the sanction of such a supposed authority as our text, we have known religious servants who have risen above their masters, and lectured and reproved them—We have known men who have left their callings, and rushed into offices for which they were not designed—We have known females, who, instead of being keepers at home, have neglected their husbands and children to gad about after favourite preachers—We have known orthodox professors, who have broken out into every kind of rudeness and rancour, under a notion of being faithful, and valiant for the truth. Disputants have contended earnestly for the faith, with pens dipped in gall, and tongues set on fire of hell—Persecutors have killed others to do God service; and the priest, with the crucifix, has urged the dragoon not to do the work of the Lord deceitfully, or keep back his sword from shedding of blood!

The decision may be improved by applying it in two cases. First, in judging ourselves. And here the leaning should be to the side of severity. Let us be satisfied with nothing short of the real power of religion. Whatever we depend upon, while we are strangers to this, will be more than useless—it will issue in the most dreadful disappointment. It is better to err on the side of caution than of self-security. According to our Saviour, the delusion accompanies some to the very door of heaven: they knock, with confidence that they shall be admitted; and are surprised and confounded when they hear from within, I know you not whence ye are. Do not place your religion in attending on divine ordinances; or in a mere belief of the truth; or in some outward reformation; or in some particular course of duty to which you may have inducements that render it easy. Search and try your ways. See whether you have given God your whole heart, and can sacrifice every bosom lust. See whether your religion has any thing in it above the efficiency of natural principles—whether it is flesh or Spirit; whether you are under the law, or under grace. Examine yourselves. If believers—Does your faith work by love? And do you love in word and in tongue, or in deed and in truth? If penitents—Have you said, with Ephraim, What have I any more to do with idols? If worshippers—Do you only draw nigh to him with the mouth, and honour him with your lips, while your heart is far from him? If hearers—Has the Gospel come to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance?

Secondly; in judging others. And here the leaning should be to candour. We should beware how we deny this power to a fellow-professor, without just evidence. It is always a difficult thing to decide the degree of another man's religion. Men differ exceedingly, even in their natural temperament. How sanguine is one! How phlegmatical is another! Some are constitutionally bold and forward; others are equally timid and retreating. Is it to be supposed that all these will show their piety precisely in the same manner? We often ascribe to a religious ardour what is the effect of a liveliness and volubility of temper. Hence when we meet with an individual who is always speaking on religious topics, we are

apt to consider him a zealous soul; and to suppose that all this talkativeness results from pious principle. Whereas it is more than probable, if we followed him through life we should find him as eager on secular occasions as on religion. On the other hand, when we meet with a man who shrinks from notice, and is backward to speak of divine things, and especially of his own experience; we frequently set him down as one who is not fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. But may not this man be very much the same in all other cases? And if so, should we not do him injustice by judging of his state in religion by the slowness of his speech, and the hesitation of his temper, and the tardiness of his conduct, which constitute a caret in his whole life? Judge not after the outward appearance; but judge righteous judgment.

Again. If you have reason to conclude that a fellow-Christian has this divine reality, let it satisfy you. Love and esteem him, though he differs from your opinions; and walks not with you in the outward order of the Gospel. What is the chaff to the wheat? I love those Scriptures which inspire us with a zeal, not to make proselytes to a party, but converts to the Saviour—which tend to unite the truly pious to each other, and embattle them against the common foe—which diminish those inferior things that bigots are always magnifying; and attach supreme importance to those that infinitely deserve it—"For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

AUGUST 8.

"*Lord, teach us to pray.*"—Luke xi. 1.

This was the language of one of his disciples, as soon as he had heard *him* pray "in a certain place." He did not interrupt our Lord in the exercise; but when he had ceased, he said, wishing to resemble him, "Lord, teach us to pray."

It was well in him, not only to attach importance to prayer, and to feel his own ignorance and insufficiency in the performance; but to address one who is always able and willing to hear and help us. None teaches like him. Four ways he teaches to pray.

First. By his word. A form or model—why not both?—was immediately given these disciples—"He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil"—The Scripture at large has many instructions how we are to pray. In one place we are told to pray without ceasing—In another to come boldly to the throne of grace—In another to let our words be few—In another to ask in faith, nothing wavering—In another to ask in the name of Jesus—"If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Secondly. By his example. Whoever lives without prayer, *he* did not. His example has the force of a law; and he "that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked." As to place—he prayed in the wilderness, and he prayed in the garden. As to time—we read of his rising up early in the morning to pray; and praying in the evening; and continuing all night in prayer. As to observation—he prayed privately, alone, and with his disciples, and in public. As to cases—he prayed when he was baptized; and has taught us to sanctify all ordinances and duties by prayer. When going to send forth his Apostles, he prayed, to teach us to engage in no enterprise, relying on our own wisdom and strength. When he was transfigured, he prayed, to teach us how to escape the snares of glory and greatness. With strong crying and tears he made supplication, when he was sore amazed and very heavy, to teach us, if afflicted to pray. To teach us to love our enemies, when they pierced his hands and his feet, he prayed—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And to teach us how to finish our course, he dies praying,—"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Thirdly. By his providence. Ah! Christians, this may explain many a dispensation that has made you tremble and grieve. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early"—That is, I will teach them to pray. What did Absalom, when he wished for an interview with Joab, who, when sent for, refused to come? Go, said he to his servant, and set his corn on fire—and then he will soon come. And so it fell out. And speedily and eagerly approaching him, Why hast thou done this? says Joab. Absalom replies—Not because I designed to injure thee; but I wanted to converse with thee; and my messengers were refused. So, when you are lifeless in prayer, and backward in the exercise, and disregard the invitation, "Seek ye my face;" some fiery trial consumes or threatens some of your possessions or comforts; and, alarmed and perplexed, then you anxiously say unto God, "Do not con-

demn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me." You then also want succour and consolation; and therefore pray, "Let thy lovingkindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant." How many of the prayers of God's people in the Scripture were, both in their reality and excellency too, the offspring of those measures by which the Lord not only chastened, but taught them!

Fourthly. By his Spirit. What means "praying in the Holy Ghost," but praying by his influence? Why is he called "the Spirit of grace and of supplications?" Is it not because he brings us upon our knees, and keeps us instant in prayer? If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his: and this Spirit awakens the conscience, and makes us sensible of our needy and perishing condition: and shows us the glory, as well as the absolute importance of divine blessings: and causes us to hunger and thirst after righteousness; and leads us into all the truth connected with our relief; and through the blood of the Cross, inspiring hope and confidence, enables us to cry, Abba, Father.

Nor is it only in the beginning of a devotional life that this assistance is required: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," says the Apostle: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And where is the Christian who would not often have given over the exercise, under a sense of his imperfections and weaknesses, but for the hope of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; and the promise, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" This has revived him again; and, out of weakness, he has been made strong; and delighted himself in the Almighty.

Happy they who, by the great Teacher, are thus taught to pray. You may be ignorant of many things. But you know your way to the throne of grace. You may have little learning; but you can speak the language of Canaan. You may be unnoticed of your fellow-creatures; but your fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And a life of prayer will soon be followed by an eternity of praise.

But how awful the condition of those, who never express this desire—Lord, teach us to pray! Can the love or the fear of the Lord dwell in you! Can you dispense with the blessings of salvation? Or do you think that God, who has said, "For all these things will I be inquired of," will deny himself? Well: *another* instructer will soon teach you to pray—a dying hour—a judgment-day. But you will pray in vain! "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

AUGUST 9.

"Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness."—Jer. xiii. 16.

—The removal of the Gospel is darkness. The Gospel will never be removed from the world; but it may be withdrawn from a particular place or people. And this has been done. The Jews are an eminent example. The kingdom of God was taken from them. And when we consider the miracles, the institutions, the privileges, by which they were distinguished, and see how they were all laid waste; well may the Apostle say, Behold the severity of God—and if he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Where now are the seven churches in Asia! Where is the famous church of Rome, whose faith was spoken of throughout the whole world! At present, you have the inestimable benefit. Be not as the swine, who knows not the value of the pearl, and therefore tramples it under foot. What wonder, if the manna should be taken away, when you despise it as light food! The Scriptures may be continued, and the preaching of the Gospel be removed: and thus the word may be precious, because there is no open vision. What a blessing to see our teachers; and to hear a word behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it! Faith cometh by hearing. And what, if the Lord should send a famine in the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water; but of hearing the words of the Lord—and we shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it! Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness.

—Impenitence is darkness. A man may be surrounded with food; yet he dies, if he cannot use and digest it, as much as if the aliment was wanting. The means of grace may remain, and we become incapable of deriving benefit from them. It is an awful fact, that God punishes one sin by another, and judicially blinds those who provoke him. Because they like not to retain him in their knowledge, he gives them up to a reprobate mind. Because they receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved, he sends them strong delusion to believe a lie. They are joined to idols; and he lets them alone. They delight in error; and they find it. They seek objections to the faith once delivered to the saints; and they are overcome by them. They trifle with the Gospel; and, at length, they cannot seriously regard it, or feel any impression under it. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.

Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness.

—Public calamity is darkness. Was not the Babylonish bondage darkness to the Jews; when their country, the glory of all lands, was desolated; and they carried away captives, and oppressed as slaves, and insulted as a proverb and a by word? And would not national distress be darkness to us? Some effects of this, we have experienced: but how inconsiderable have they yet been, compared with the sufferings of other countries, or with our own deserts! And is there no danger of greater? If God has a controversy with us, it is in vain to argue—we must submit. If he is provoked and determined to punish, vain is the authority of rulers, the wisdom of statesmen, the courage of warriors. "But he has a people among us." He has—and he will take care of his own: but he can secure them, and destroy others. Or even they themselves may help forward, or even occasion the calamity—for no sins offend him like those of his own people. And they may be chastened of the Lord, that they may not be *condemned* with the world. When the ship sailed from Joppa, there was only one good man on board; and the storm was for *his* sake; and the sea could only be calmed by his being cast into it. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness.

—The loss of reason is darkness. And how soon may the understanding be eclipsed! How easily may the slender and mysterious basis on which intellect rests be destroyed! See Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like an ox. See the philosopher, moping in drivelling idiocy. Religion can only operate through the medium of thought: and therefore, while you have your mental powers, employ them —lest darkness come upon you.

—The loss of health is darkness. Is it nothing to be made to possess months of vanity? or to have wearisome nights appointed us?—To be chastened, also, with pain upon our bed, and the multitude of our bones with strong pain; so that our life abhorreth bread, and our soul dainty meat; and our bones, that were not seen, stick out! Yet, on this season, many suspend an attention to the concerns of religion. When thought is broken to pieces; and every avenue to the soul is occupied with the anguish of disease, and the anxieties of recovery; surely sufficient for that day is the evil thereof. Use your health while you have it, lest darkness come upon you.—The same applies to age. Then desire fails; the grasshopper is a burden: sight, and hearing, and memory, and judgment, decline. Remember, therefore, says Solomon, now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

Death is darkness. Then you must give up your employments, however interesting; your possessions, however valued; your connexions, however endeared; your religious advantages, however important—and, stripped and silent, retire into the gloom of the grave. This darkness is certain. It cannot be remote. It may be close at hand. There may be but a step between me and death—"before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

—Hell is darkness—outer darkness; where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The dreadfulness of this state, it is impossible either to describe or imagine. But we know that it is possible to escape it. We also know, that the present is the only opportunity. Behold, *now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness.

Blessed be God for his longsuffering goodness, and his warning mercy. He might justly have spared his words, and come instantly to blows. But he speaks before he strikes: and he threatens that he may not destroy. May the kind alarm awaken our fear; and may our fear produce flight; and may we flee for refuge to the hope set before us, even Jesus, who delivers from the wrath to come.

AUGUST 10.

"*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"
John iii. 30.

This was spoken of the Redeemer, by his forerunner John. And it is not to be considered as the language of complaint, or sullen acquiescence—as if he would say, "I dislike it; but it is unavoidable. It is my grief; and I must bear it." No. It was as agreeable to his feelings, as it was firm in his belief. And it showed a fine and a noble soul in this man. The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy. We love something distinguishing, and therefore exclusive. We wish to rise, even by the depression of others. It is trying, even to a good man, to withdraw, and see a successor filling his place better than himself, and, as the honours he has worn are transferred to another, to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It is not an easy thing to go down well; or for a setting star to exult in a rising sun.

But it was thus with John. He knew his rank, and approved of his place. He was the servant, not the master. The friend, not the bridegroom—The Church was not married to him. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom,

which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

What does he mean by this increase? Not an increase in his temporal condition. As he had been poor, so he was to continue. Many of his professed followers seek great things to themselves: but we may judge of his estimation of them by his choice: for they were all within his reach. But though he had a kingdom, it was not of this world. Nor is it by any kind of earthly distinction and indulgence that he has characterized Christians, or raised their hope. He has nowhere engaged to make them rich in this world's good, but only rich in faith. He has nowhere told them that they shall be free from trouble, but only that in him they shall have peace.

The increase partly regards his personal ministry. Both John and Jesus were preachers and leaders. John's "course" was ending; but Jesus was only commencing his public work. John was going to lose his disciples; and Jesus to gain them; and to become a much more famous minister, by miracles, and clearness and grandeur of doctrine, and the permanency of his success. Indeed, we have no reason to believe that John ever preached after this. The end of his mission was answered. He was a voice; and, having made his proclamation, he was silenced. He was the morning star; and, having ushered the Sun of Righteousness in, he disappeared. He was the forerunner to introduce the Messiah; but the Messiah was now come, and verified, and acknowledged.

But it was the same as saying, Christianity must increase. Christianity was small at first; but it was to resemble the shining light, which begins with the dawn, but becomes perfect day. Or to be like the mustard seed, which, however diminutive, grows the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Or the portion of leaven, which, hid in the meal, continues to diffuse itself till the whole be leavened. His doctrine was possessed only by himself for a time. He then communicated the secret to twelve; then to seventy. His followers, after this, were not numerous: and they consisted chiefly of the common people: for it was scornfully asked, "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" After various trials, the number of disciples in Jerusalem, previously to the descent of the Spirit, were about one hundred and twenty. Then three thousand were added in one day—and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. Thus mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed. It soon spread beyond the bounds of Judea, and reached the ends of the Roman world—the heralds thanking God, who always caused them to triumph in Christ, and made manifest the savour of his knowledge by them in every place. How much has his cause done since! And how is it expanding now!—But a vaster increase is yet to take place. His glory shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For now shall he be great to the ends of the earth. Such is the language of the Scripture; and nothing has yet taken place sufficient to fulfil it. It is therefore before us. We know that Heathenism, and Mahomedanism, and "the Man of Sin," shall be destroyed. And we know that the Jews shall look on him whom they have pierced—and if the casting them away was the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

And there is no uncertainty here—it *must* be. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. His death insures it. He has power over all flesh to accomplish it. Let those who love him, and are labouring to advance his cause, rejoice, and be encouraged—*they cannot* fail. "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen."

AUGUST 11.

"*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.*"—Phil. ii. 12.

"THAT which is unsavoury cannot be eaten without salt." And therefore, to render it palatable, we season it. When we are going to reprove a fault, or enforce a duty, we should, as much as possible, commend: for praise opens the mind, and prepares for the reception of rebuke or admonition. This wisdom the Apostle here displays. There was nothing in him like flattery; but, to introduce his most solemn charge, that they would work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, he applauds these Philippians with four things.

First. Their *obedience*. Belief, knowledge, profession, talk; every thing is vain without this. The Gospel was made known for the obedience of faith—And these Philippians had "obeyed."

Secondly. The *constancy* of their practice. Lot's wife, at the angel's command, left Sodom; but "she looked back." The Galatians "did run well: but were hindered:" "they began in the spirit, and ended in the flesh." The goodness of Ephraim and Judah was like a morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away—But these Philippians had "always" obeyed.

Thirdly. The *increase* of their diligence and zeal. They had "much more" obeyed.

They not only held on their way, but waxed stronger and stronger: not only continued, but always abounded in the work of the Lord. Nothing is more desirable or pleasing than to see this progression—It is like the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is like the springing of the earth; first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear.

Fourthly. The progress of their improvement *under disadvantages*. They had much more obeyed "in his absence" than in his presence—When he was no longer with them as a witness to observe; as an example to excite; as a preacher to warn and to animate them. Some attend the word and worship of God from the influence of a friend, or the authority of a father or a master. Jehoash followed the Lord all the days of Jehoiada, the high priest, who brought him up; but as soon as this eminent servant of God was dead, the young prince became an idolater, and even slew a prophet of the Lord. There are many who regard the eye of man more than the eye of God. It is well when our devotion springs from inward principle, and does not depend upon outward excitement: when we not only forsake, but abhor that which is evil; and not only follow but cleave to that which is good. There is scarcely an individual, perhaps, that does not sometimes pray. But does he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God? There are few but are afflicted, or alarmed into occasional piety. But are we the same in health, as in sickness? In the house, as in the temple? On the week, as on the Sabbath?

What an immense loss must the Philippians have sustained in Paul's absence from them! Yet they obeyed much more in his absence than in his presence. Surely this shows that when he left them, God did not leave them. It teaches us that God does not depend upon instruments, though he is pleased to make use of them. It proves that, by his own Spirit, he can make up for the want of any creature advantage. When, by persecution, the Church has been deprived of her pastors; or, by accident or disease, Christians have been destitute of the public ordinances of religion; they have seen his power and his glory *as* they have seen him in the sanctuary. The streams were gone; but the Fountain was near. And where the providence of God has denied the usual means of grace, we have known the sufferers to prosper in the divine life, even more than those who have enjoyed an affluence of privileges.

"I cannot bear *thine* absence, Lord—
My *life* expires, if *Thou* depart:
Be thou, my heart, still near my God,
And Thou, my God, be near my heart."

AUGUST 12.

"Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."—Psalm xxx. 4.

It would be perfectly useless to call upon *others* to do this, in their present state—

"None but the soul that feels His grace
Can triumph in His holiness."

Since the Fall, this attribute, which renders God so amiable in himself, and which draws forth the highest praises of heaven, makes him unlovely to an apostate creature. There is nothing the sinner thinks of with so much dislike as a perfection that justifies all his fears, and opposes all his inclinations and pursuits. What an enemy the world naturally is to the holiness of God may be seen in the practice of the heathens. Among all the heroes they deified, they advanced none for those qualities which approach the most nearly to it; but frequently for passions the most remote from it; and, at best, only for some physical power, valued or useful, in the concerns of this life. Esculapius was deified for his skill in curing diseases. Bacchus for the use of the grape. Vulcan for his operations in fire. Hercules for his destroying monsters. But not one of them all was advanced to this honour for the virtue of holiness—as if this property was beneath their notice in the formation of a deity; or they loved a god better that had nothing to do with it.

It was upon this principle that they, who are now saints, "would" once themselves "have none of him;" and really said unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Hence, if they loved the Sabbath, it was as a day of leisure and recreation; not as "the holy of the Lord." Hence, they disliked his people, as renewed, because they were images of this pure original.

What a blessed evidence is it in their favour, that they can now "glory in his holy name;" and "sing and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness!" But such is the change they have experienced, that they *do* contemplate him with pleasure as holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. It is a relief, a satisfaction to their minds, in every perplexity in nature or providence, that the Judge of all the earth must do right. They delight in the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, after the inward man. The Gospel appears to their minds, glorious, because "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." This attribute now smiles upon them. They have a vast interest and hope in it. As He is holy, they can depend upon his truth; and are assured of the fulfilment of his

word. They know that He, who has said, I will abundantly pardon; I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; is a God that cannot lie. Yes, says the Christian, since he who loves me is purity itself, and his influence is almighty, he will sprinkle clean water upon me, and *I* shall be clean. He will destroy in me the sin which he infinitely hates. He will make me a *partaker* of his holiness, and render me meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

But without this love to holiness we cannot see the kingdom of God. We are, both by Scripture and by the nature of the case, excluded for ever from his presence; which could only make us miserable. What fellowship hath light with darkness? What communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness?

Some talk of the less amiable views of the Supreme Being—yea, of the darker side of the Deity. And what side is this? The Scripture tells me; and—I believe it—I feel it—that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Therefore, thus saith the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

AUGUST 13.

"*And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?*"—2 Sam. ix. 1.

Let me not pass by this without remark.

—*See the low estate of Saul's house!* He had a very numerous family, sufficient to have replenished a country; and yet it was now so reduced, dispersed, concealed, or unknown, that it was necessary to inquire whether any remains of it were left. So God setteth the solitary in families. Some houses, distinguished by their wealth and nobility, fall into indigence and obscurity; while others are completely terminated, their last branch having withered in the dust. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased." Vanity of vanities! saith the preacher—all is vanity!

See *a fine instance of the forgiveness of injuries.* Saul had been David's sworn foe; and had pursued him to the last with remorseless malignity. Yet, while he was alive, David never took an advantage to injure him, when he had him completely in his power. And when he died, he mourned over him; and eulogized him, far beyond his desert. And, years after, he inquires whether any of his family was left—not to cut them off, lest they should disturb his government—or to punish the sins of the father upon the children. Thus Athaliah arose, and destroyed all the seed royal. Thus Abimelech would leave none remaining of his father's house, and slew his brethren, the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone—And the same barbarous exterminations have been always practised in the East—But David asks if any is left, to "show him kindness." Let us learn from hence, not to avenge ourselves; but rather to give place unto wrath. A greater than David has said, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you." And he perfectly exemplified his own command; "When reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not;" but prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We have here a *proof of real and refined affection*—That I may show him kindness "for Jonathan's sake." Jonathan had been his bosom friend; and his open and generous conduct had justly endeared him to David. Steadiness of attachment is to be admired. Thy own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. A friend is born for adversity; and loveth at all times: and his regard will extend beyond the individual, to his connexions and offspring. God himself acts upon this principle; and tells us that the children of his servant shall continue, and that the generation of the upright shall be blessed. "I have been young," says David, "and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And shall not we act upon the same principle in another case? Who remembered us in our low estate? Who, when rich, for our sakes became poor? Who died, that we might live? He was received up into glory; and is no more in the world—But are there none left of *his* family who stand in need of our assistance? Let us pity and relieve them. Whatever we do unto one of the least of all these, he will esteem as done unto himself.

It was *honourable in David not to wait to be addressed, but to endeavour to search out the object.* We are to *devise* liberal things; and not only to seize, but to seek opportunities of doing good. The most needy and deserving are generally the least clamourous: and, like the stricken deer, retire, and bleed alone. Such we must seek after. We should not wait for the enforcement of claims, if conscience tells us they are due. Some, we fear, would never pay a debt, if they thought

the creditor had forgotten it. But justice is the rule of our duty.

—We can go no further in our praise of David. Surely his kindness loses somewhat of its excellency in its lateness. Mephibosheth was five years old when David ascended the throne; and was now married and had a son. Thus a considerable number of years must have elapsed since God had delivered David out of all his adversity—He, therefore, (though better late than never) should have made this inquiry much earlier. What shall we say to this! We ought to make the best of every thing, especially in the conduct of great and good men. But none of them are faultless. And the Sacred Writers always show their impartiality. They always record things just as they occurred, regardless of consequences: their only aim is truth. It has been said, in exculpation of David, that he was so much engaged in war, and pressed with such a multiplicity of engagements! There was a truth in this; but it does not entirely excuse him. He had entered into covenant with Jonathan: and should immediately have shown his seed "the kindness of God;" that is, the kindness which he had sworn in his presence to exercise. Let us take heed that indulgence does not harden the heart: and when we prosper, let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. The prosperity of fools destroys them; and the prosperity of wise men commonly injures them. As people rise in the world, they lose their recollection. The Chief Butler did not remember Joseph, but forgat him—Lord, what is man!

In all things Jesus has the pre-eminence. He remembered us as soon as he came into his kingdom. And, though he passed into the heavens, he is still touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

AUGUST 14.

"*And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?*"—2 Sam. ix. 7, 8.

David had inquired whether there was any left of the house of Saul, that he might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake. Upon which Ziba, an old retainer in Saul's family, said unto the king, "Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet." This lameness was occasioned by an accident, in consequence of the battle of Gilboa, by which his grandfather and his father were both slain. The nurse, not only from the terror such an event naturally inspires, but also from knowing that Mephibosheth was now the heir apparent to the throne, and that the victors would eagerly seek to apprehend him; to secure and conceal her precious charge, took him up and fled; but fell, and crippled him for life. To how many perils are children exposed in their rearing! and how thankful should we feel to the providence of God, if we have escaped them!

Yet, instead of pitying Mephibosheth, we ought rather to congratulate him on this affliction. In the earlier stages of society corporeal accomplishments are much rated; and had not Mephibosheth been thus disfigured and dismembered, the adherents of Saul's house would probably, as he was the next heir, have proclaimed *him*, instead of his uncle Ishbosheth—and then it is most likely he would have been murdered, as *he* was. Who knows what is good for a man in this vain life? And who knows what is evil? How often have we deprecated things for which we have afterwards been thankful! How much do we owe to the disappointments of life! What dangers have ill health, or reduced substance, prevented!

> "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take!
> The clouds ye so much dread
> Are big with mercy, and shall break
> In blessings on your head."

—"And the king said, Where is he? And Ziba said, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar." Here, probably, resided in obscurity, his mother's relations: and here he himself was forgotten, like a dead man out of mind. Machir, with whom he dwelt, seems to have been a noble, generous man, who took charge of Mephibosheth from pity for one born to honour, and the son of so excellent a father; and not from any disaffection to David. Yea, we afterward find him equally kind to David; and furnishing him with every refreshment when he was driven an exile into his neighbourhood, by the rebellion of Absalom. And may not David's kindness to Mephibosheth at this time have induced Machir the more promptly and extensively to exert himself in favour of David in his subsequent distress? If so, it says, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." The aid we impart to-day, we may want to-morrow. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The king sent and fetched him. And observe his introduction at Court—When he was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. David had done the very same to this cripple's father a few years before, bowing himself three times to the earth. What changes take place in the conditions of men! David had too reflective a mind not to think of this. He had probably never seen Mephibosheth before, though he was born about the time of his intimacy with his beloved father. The first thing I suppose he would look for in his features, would be the image

of Jonathan. David had too much sensibility not to be impressed with the affecting scene. Feeling is always brief in expression—He utters only one word: but the manner in which he pronounced it said every thing—And David said, MEPHIBOSHETH! It was the language of surprise, tenderness, and endearment.

—Why was he afraid of David? It is not probable that he apprehended any danger from him. But he had been living in the country, and in privacy, from a child. And it is no unusual thing for a stranger to be intimidated at the presence of a very superior and extraordinary man. Madame de Stael, though accustomed to the highest society, and endued with such powers of address and conversation, says she was breathless in the company of the late Emperor of France; and could never rise above this prostration of mind. But David was a greater man, and as great a warrior, considering the age in which he lived. Seeing the depression of his countenance, and his tremour;

—David said to him, "Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan's sake"—and gave him the assurance of two things. First. Upon the suppression of Ishbosheth's faction, Saul's estate had been confiscated to the crown: this he promises to give him, with all its future revenues. And secondly. He assigns him a residence in his palace, and a constant access to himself. I will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

And how did Mephibosheth receive these honours? He was not one of those who take every favour as a debt, and imagine their friends are only doing their duty; and very imperfectly, too, perhaps; in every kindness they show them—But he exclaims, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am!" A dog is fitter to be under the table, than at the side of it; and a dead dog is fitter for the ditch, than the palace—It was a strong, proverbial expression, used to signify how mean, and base, and unworthy, and unqualified, he deemed himself. But if *he* received these benefits from David with so much thankfulness and humility, how ought *we* to feel under those blessings which God bestows upon us? And here let me ask three questions.

And first—not to dwell on the ordinary bounties of his providence: Has he not remembered us in our low estate? Has he not sought and saved our souls? Has he not restored our forfeited inheritance? Has he not given us a name and a place in his house, that we may eat and drink at his table in his kingdom?

Secondly. And are not the blessings he has conferred upon us infinitely greater than those Mephibosheth received from David? It might seem an immense thing to a worldly mind, to be fetched out of distant obscurity; and enriched with a royal demesne; and allowed to live at a splendid court. But Mephibosheth, perhaps, was not even so happy as before; and for whatever purposes he valued his elevation, he soon left it; and found that he had set his eyes on that which is not. But we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Our dignities and enjoyments yield the most perfect satisfaction. And they will endure for ever.

Thirdly. And how much less reason had we to look for such favours from God, than Mephibosheth had to expect such bestowments from David! He was David's fellow-creature; and he had a claim founded in a community of nature. He was the son of an intimate friend, to whom he was under obligation. He was also a relation; being the child of his brother-in-law. Though a sufferer, he was innocent, and had always conducted himself properly towards David.

—But, Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him? We were strangers—enemies by wicked works—unworthy of the least of all his mercies—deserving that his wrath should come upon us as the children of disobedience. What then ought to be our self-abasement! our gratitude! But where are they! Are they urging us to exclaim, Not unto us, O Lord; not unto us!—By thy grace we are what we are! Are they inducing us to utter abundantly the memory of his great goodness; and recommend him all the day long to others? Are they constraining us, by his mercies, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service?

AUGUST 15.

"*Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.*"—Psalm lxv. 1.

HERE we have the Church's praise, and the Church's vow: the suspension of the one; and the fulfilment of the other.

In general, God waits for our praise. And how slow and reluctant are we in rendering it! And how seldom, at last, do we render according to the benefit done unto us! Here praise waits in Sion for him. The meaning is, that the deliverance or blessing which they were in need of had not arrived; but they were looking for it—They had their harp in their hand, ready to strike up a song of thanksgiving; but delay kept them *silent*. Praise waited, therefore, because the Church waited.

And this is no unusual thing, First, as to their spiritual experience. They wish to be able to view him as the strength of their

heart and their portion for ever; and to claim all the exceeding great and precious promises as their own. But they are doubtful and uncertain; yea, they often exclude themselves from all part and lot in the matter. Now we cannot praise him for what we think he has not done for us or given to us; but only for what he has. If, therefore, he has forgiven, and accepted us, the acknowledgment of the blessing requires the knowledge of it. Yet how many are in a state of anxiety, waiting for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; and praying, Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation! And,

Secondly, as to providential dispensations. How long was it, even after David had been anointed by Samuel, before he was established on the throne! How long did Joseph wait, with every prospect growing darker, before his prophetic dreams were accomplished! And so Abraham, only "after he had patiently endured, obtained the promise." God keeps back, till self-despair and the failure of creature confidence have spread a dark ground on which his glory *must* be seen. He loves to astonish as well as succour. He will convince us in future difficulties that he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. Therefore, at evening time it is light: and he turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

Here, however, let it be observed, that Christians cannot be ever *entirely* silent. They have always much to praise God for. Whatever be their present condition—it might have been much worse—yea, in every thing they are to give thanks. Nor will they be silent *long*. The vision is only for an appointed time. Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. And they need not be silent *at all* if they have faith in God: for faith can see the certainty of the thing before it takes place; and cause us always to triumph in Christ, while yet the warfare is not actually accomplished.

If hope deferred maketh the heart sick, when it cometh it is a tree of life. Therefore says the Church, "Unto thee shall the vow be performed." The vow means, their solemn engagement to praise him when the deliverance or blessing arrived. "If he appears to my joy, I will give him the glory that is due unto his Name—witness my vow." We do not always admire vows. They often ensnare the soul, and give the enemy an advantage over us. And Christians, as they advance in self-knowledge, are commonly more disposed to pray *to* God, than to stipulate *with* him. It is a useful hint which Cowper gives us—

> "Beware of Peter's word:
> Nor confidently say,
> I never will deny thee, Lord:
> But, grant I never may."

Yet vows, in some cases, may be useful. They may prove as a kind of fence to the field, or hem to the garment. They may serve to remind us when we forget; and to humble us when we fail. But two things should be always observed. The first is, that they be formed in an entire dependence upon divine grace. "By thee only will we make mention of thy name." "Through God we shall do valiantly."

The second is, that when we have made them, we should be concerned to fulfil them. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." Yet how often have men bound themselves when they were in danger, sickness, and affliction; and forgetting, or violating their vow, have turned again to folly! Even Jacob, after all his solemn covenanting with God, in the prospect of his journey, was awfully remiss upon his return; till, divinely rebuked, he said—"Let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. Hannah was more exemplary. She had vowed, that if her prayer was answered, she would give her son to the Lord as long as he lived. The surrender was painful: but as soon as she had weaned him, she took him to Shiloh, and brought him to Eli: "And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

AUGUST 16.

"Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee."—Matt. xvii. 27.

How well was it foretold that his name should be called, Wonderful!

What a surprising combination of attributes was displayed in him! Observe the case before us. Here, while we behold his penury and dependence—so that he did not possess wherewithal to pay the temple-tribute; we perceive his omniscience—so that in Peter's house he could pierce the waters of the sea, and discern a particular fish, and see what was in its body, and announce a piece of money there, and the very *name* of the coin. Surely the darkness hideth not from him; but the night shineth as the day. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his

sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

He who saw the *stater* in this fish sees what money we are in possession of—and how we acquired it—and the way in which we are using it. He sees whether we are needlessly hoarding, or wastefully expending it. He sees whether we are making it our hope and confidence, or valuing it only as an instrument of lawful enjoyment, and of pious and benevolent use. He sees the responsibilities of the owner; and knows how he will feel when he shall be called to leave it; and when he will be required to give an account of it at the last day.

Here we also behold his power and dominion. He is Lord of all. The beasts of the field obey him. At his bidding, not a dog moves his tongue in the departure of the Israelites. At his command, the dumb ass speaks with man's voice, and rebukes the madness of the Prophet. The fowls of the air obey him—At his order, the ravens bring Elijah bread and meat in the morning and the evening. The fishes of the sea obey him—At his command, a great fish swallows the disobedient, and disembarks the penitent Jonah —And here, a fish, at his requirement, goes and takes up from the bottom of the sea a stater, and then goes and bites at Peter's hook, with this in his maw! "All things are put under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea."

Could any thing be better adapted to encourage the confidence of the disciples in the kindness and all-sufficiency of his providence, when he was sending them forth as sheep among wolves, and without any known supplies to live upon? He commissioned the seventy to go in pairs through the whole country. But he sent them forth without purse, or scrip, or shoes. And they had, it would seem, many uneasy and distracting thoughts at the time. They did not indeed express them; but our Lord was aware of them, and remembered them. And when they came back, he brings them to their own recollection—"How came you to think that I, who employed you, should not provide for you?—Why did you doubt my inclination or my ability? When I sent you forth without purse and scrip, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing, Lord."

Are you called to leave behind you those who seem to hang on your care? Hear this Saviour at your dying bed saying—"Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me." "O fear the Lord, all ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

AUGUST 17.

"*Ye know all things.*"—1 John ii. 20

The reason or the cause is previously given —"We have an unction from the Holy One." This unction means the Spirit of grace and truth. This the Saviour possessed personally: he "was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power;" and had the Spirit without measure. And as Mediator for the suffering of death, he received all the fulness of it for the supply of his people. They therefore derive it from him: and it is not only sanctifying, but illuminating: it leads them "into all truth;" and "they know all things." This is a bold expression. But the extensiveness of it must be taken with four distinctions.

First. It means only things *religious*. It does not intend to intimate that every Christian is familiar with the secrets of nature; the resources of trade; the mysteries of government; the structure of language; and a thousand other things. With regard to these, he may be far surpassed by the people of the world. Not that religion stultifies its possessor: it is favourable to the acquisition of knowledge generally, by rousing and employing the mind, and thereby improving it. But it is distinguishable from learning and science; and makes us acquainted with "the things which accompany salvation."

Secondly. It means not only things religious, but *revealed*. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." This passage should never be forgotten. It would draw some persons a little further from the decrees of God, and a little nearer to his commands. The sacred writers prophesy but in part. Had every thing been made known in the Scripture, the world could not have contained the books that would have been written; and our attention would have been so divided and diffused, that the one thing needful would have been forgotten. There are numberless subjects, upon which a busy and curious mind would speculate, concerning which the Word is silent. But where God says nothing, we are not to be wise above what is written. If men will conjecture, let them conjecture without devouring much of their time, or injuring their temper; and without censoriousness, self-conceit, and positiveness. He that hath a dream, let him tell a dream. What is the chaff to the wheat? When our Saviour had foretold the duty and destination of Peter; and Peter, not satisfied with this, inquired concerning John —"Lord, and what shall this man do?" instead of answering him, he reproved his impatient and presumptuous curiosity: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."

Thirdly. It not only means things revealed; but revealed things of *importance*. Every thing, even in the Scripture, is not equally momentous and interesting. Some things are hard to be understood; but then it is not necessary to be able to understand them. Yet such things as these are not without their use, if they make us humble, by showing us the limits of the human understanding; and lead us, while we *adore here*—to *study elsewhere*. How many things are there in the geography, the chronology, the natural philosophy of the Scriptures, in which we may be safely unversed! A man may be able to number his days, so as to apply his heart unto wisdom, without knowing when Antichrist will be destroyed. He may not know what creature Behemoth was, or where Ophir was; and yet he may know what is life eternal; and the way to it he may know. The Jews had the fiery cloudy pillar, not to examine, but to follow. They knew no more of its essence at the end of forty years than at the beginning: but it had led them by a right way to the city of habitation. There are things which concern the Lord Jesus: and to know these is the excellency of knowledge. These will make us wise unto salvation. There are things that are ornamental to a Christian—and these are not to be undervalued; but others are essential to his very being. Some things conduce to our comfort; but others involve even our safety. It is desirable, but not equally necessary, that a Christian should be informed in all these truths.

Fourthly. With regard to things of importance, it only means a *comparative* knowledge of these in our present state. Of the God of grace, as well as of the God of nature, we are compelled to say—"How small a portion is known of Him!" What one truth is there that we can trace back completely to its rise, or follow on to its last outfall! We read of things which angels desire to look into; of a peace which passeth all understanding; of a joy unspeakable. The love of Christ passeth knowledge.

> "The cross, the manger, and the throne,
> Are big with glories yet unknown."

More we cannot concede. If Christians are comparatively ignorant, they are comparatively wise. They are children of the light and of the day. They have an understanding given them to know him that is true. Not that they are endued with a new physical faculty; but they have another kind of knowledge; and it is as superior as it is peculiar. There is as much difference between their present and their former knowledge as between the shining of the glow-worm and the vital lustre of the sun. They have a *heart* to know. They see divine things, not only in their reality, but in their *beauty* and *excellency;* and while this gives them a firmer conviction of their certainty than they had before, so it gains their affection to them, and brings their souls under their influence. Thus with them the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. They walk in the light, as he is in the light. The secret of the Lord is with them, and he shows them his covenant. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual *judgeth all things!*"

Thus another reproach is rolled away. Christians are not only considered as slaves; as cowards; as the victims of gloom and melancholy; but are often despised or pitied as fools. Yet are they the wisest people in the world. Their religion, from first to last, is wisdom. And it is justified of all her children

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AUGUST 18.

"*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord.*"—Psalm v. 3.

Authors have found the morning the best time for study and composition. Hence it has been called the friend of the muses. It would be easy to prove that it is equally a friend to the graces and the duties. It is the finest season for reflection and devotion. David found it so; and therefore resolves: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord." What voice? The voice of praise; and the voice of prayer: the one excited by looking back; the other, by looking forward.

How much is there in the morning to call forth the voice of thanksgiving! Let us think of the season we have just passed through. How many houseless creatures this night have had no place where to lay their head! How many victims of accident and disease have been full of tossing to and fro, until the dawning of the day; their beds have not comforted them, nor their couch eased their complaint! How many have been deprived of repose while attending their neighbours, friends, and relations, in sickness and sorrow! How many, since the last setting sun, have entered an awful eternity! How many, this night, have been cut off in their sins! Many have been terrified, robbed, injured, murdered, by wicked and unreasonable men! How many have been consumed by fire, or drowned with water! How many, this night, have been engaged in works of darkness; and who, if any knew them, would be in the terrors of the shadow of death! How many have risen this morning to pass the day in anguish! How many to suffer want! How many, who have all things richly to enjoy, have risen only to live another day without God in the world! They lie down and rise up like the beasts that perish: God is not in all their thoughts. And

is it otherwise with us? What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

And with how many of these merciful nights have we been favoured! Hence, perhaps, we have been so little affected with the goodness of God in them. How strange! that what increases the greatness of our obligation, should diminish the sense of it! Yet it is by the interruption, the suspension, the want of our comforts, we are made to learn the value of them. Let us guard against this perverseness of ingratitude. Let us remember, that if our mercies are common, they must be numerous; and if numerous, they multiply the claims to our praise.

And shall our gratitude evaporate in a mere morning acknowledgment! Shall we not, by the mercies of God, dedicate ourselves to his service; and be in his fear all the day long?

And when we think of the day before us, how much is there to awaken concern! And what is *our* concern without the attention of God? He shall therefore in the morning hear, not only the voice of praise, but the voice of prayer.

Who is to guide me through the day upon which I have entered? How much depends upon one mistake in my movements! And how easily may I go astray! The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee."

Who is to guard me through the day? And I am much more exposed when awake than when asleep. My soul is more exposed —more exposed to sin—and sin is the greatest evil. And what am I, to resist a corrupt heart, a wicked world, and all the powers of darkness? "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. Be thou my arm every morning; my salvation also in the time of trouble."

Who is to help me through the day? I have many duties to discharge. I am to live soberly, righteously, and godly. I am to walk in wisdom towards those that are without: I am to speak the truth in love: I am to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour in all things. "Lord, without thee, I can do nothing. Let thy grace be sufficient for me; and thy strength made perfect in weakness."

Who is to give me success in the business of the day? I know I ought not to be idle; but to be diligently and prudently employed in my lawful calling. Means are mine; but how much more is necessary than my wisdom and anxiety! "The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow with it." "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain. It is in vain for me to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

Who is to prepare me for the events of the day? And I know not what the day may bring forth. Perhaps I may receive the most unwelcome intelligence. Perhaps I may sustain losses in property. Perhaps I may meet with mortifications from my fellow-creatures; and be tried with disappointments in friends. My child may this day fall sick. The desire of mine eyes may be taken away with a stroke. There may be but a step between me and death. It is wonderful we live a day through. "May I know how to be abased, or how to abound. If in the world I have tribulation, in the Saviour may I have peace. So teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom—That whether I live, I may live unto the Lord; or whether I die, I may die unto the Lord: so that, living and dying, I may be the Lord's."

AUGUST 19.

"*I am married unto you.*"—Jer. iii. 14.

Marriage is the nearest and the most intimate of all human relations. It is surpassed only by the union between soul and body. Here are two persons meeting together, who perhaps never saw each other some time before; yet, coming under the power of this ordinance, are united in a connexion that exceeds the claims of nature, and the wife becomes dearer than the dearest parent. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

Thus Christians, though once strangers, and far off, become the people of God, a people nigh unto him; yea, one with him, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.—He is not ashamed to own the relation—"I am married unto you." What is supremely and essentially included in this relation, when properly established?

In such a marriage, there is mutual love. This love regards the person, and not the endowments. And such a love there is between God and his people. It commenced on his side much earlier than on theirs; and his love to them produced their love to him. For love begets love: and we love him, because he first loved us. Yet the love *is* mutual—and he says, "I love them that love me."

The same may be said of mutual choice. In a proper marriage, the parties freely elect each other. God has chosen his people: and they have chosen him. For, though once averse to him, as their Lord and portion, they are made willing in the day of his power; and this power is not violence, but influence,

the influence of wisdom and goodness. He works in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. He draws them, and they run after him; and they can all say, from the heart, "Whom have I in heaven, but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

In this connexion, there is also confidence and communication. Where this is wanting, the spirit of it is materially injured; and the relation is very defectively maintained. It is readily allowed, that the woman should not carry on designs concealed from the husband; but is not every thing here reciprocal? And is *he* justified in treating her with reserve and silence? Yet there are many wives, who have had no intimation of the state of their husband's affairs, till they have found themselves plunged into a condition overwhelming them with surprise, as well as calamity.—The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. And they, in all their ways, acknowledge him. They pour out their hearts before him; they hide nothing from him.

There is, also, in this alliance, fellowship and community of goods. However poor or mean the wife was before, she is now raised to a participation of the husband's rank and affluence; and however free and independent he was before, the husband now enters into all the condition of the wife. And thus the believer dedicates himself to God, with all he is and has. He feels his cause his own; he deplores its reproaches; he rejoices in its success. And God gives himself, with all he is and has, to the believer. In all his afflictions he is afflicted: and he that toucheth him, toucheth the apple of his eye.

Finally. There is complacency and delight. As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will rejoice over thee with singing—

How wonderful is this! And yet how true!—

How blessed are the people who are in such a case!—

Art thou in this happy, this glorious condition? All hail! Thy Maker is thy husband. There was joy in the presence of the angels of God the hour thou gavest thy consent to the proposals of the Gospel.

Art thou willing to be united to him? His ministers invite and woo thee. Come—for all things are now ready. Resemble not Israel, who would have none of him: and so were given up. Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.

AUGUST 20.

"His going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hosea vi. 3.

"His going forth," and "his coming," mean his displays and his communications, on behalf of those who earnestly and perseveringly seek after him; according to the words immediately preceding—"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." *That* contains the *assurance* of their success. Here is added the *illustration* of it. It consists of two images, equally beautiful and encouraging.

The first derived from the morning—"His going forth is prepared as the morning." When the morning is not yet come, we fully rely upon it. We know it is coming: we know it is secured in the appointment of Providence, and the arrangements of nature. It never yet failed; and it never will as long as the world endures. And does not the God of all grace express the immutability of his counsel, by the certainty of this very allusion? "Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant." What can hinder the approach and the rising of the sun? And his going forth is prepared as *surely* as the morning.

And as *luminously* too. The morning drives away the darkness, and shines upon our path; so that we see where we are; and how to move. "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." The Lord will come, and manifest himself to his people. He will show them his covenant. He will lead them into all truth. And, with regard to doctrine, and experience, and practice; and also their interest in the Divine favour; he will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will he do unto them, and not forsake them.

It is also as *delightsome* as the morning. The night is a season of gloom, as it is a period of confinement, and danger, and fear, and anxiety. Paul's mariners, in the storm, cast four anchors, and wished for the day. David refers to travellers and sentinels, who watch for the morning, as the image of his waiting for the Lord. Some nights are less cheerless than others; but, at best, they have only the moon and stars: the sun is wanting. He alone can make the morning: and when he comes, the birds sing, the lambs play, and man partakes of the cheerfulness that spreads all around. "Truly the light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Creatures are pleasing; but none of them can supply the place of God. He is our sun, as well as our shield; and the

language of the gracious heart is—"Oh! when wilt Thou come unto me! Thou alone canst put my fears to flight. Thou alone canst inspire me with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

But the morning comes not all at once, but *gradually*. What a difference is there between the first glimmerings of the dawn, and the splendour of noon! So the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

The second is derived from the rain—"He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." God asks, "Can any of the vanities of the Gentiles send rain?" He claims the production as his own divine prerogative: and justly wonders that we do not notice it more than we do—"Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain; both the former and the latter in his season." In Judea the rain was less frequent and more periodical, than with us. It peculiarly fell after autumn and spring; that is, just after seed-time, and just before reaping: the former to soften the ground, and quicken the grain, and aid the springing thereof; the latter, to fill the corn in the ear, and hasten its maturity.

What would nature be without rain? We are equally dependent on the grace of God. But, under the influences of his Word and Spirit, we revive and grow as the corn. These influences are always needful; but is it pressing the metaphor to observe, that there are two seasons when they are peculiarly experienced? The one is connected with the beginning of the divine life—this may be called the former rain. The other, with the close of it—this may be called the latter rain. The one is to enliven. The other to confirm. To the "former," many can look back, and ask,

> "Where is the blessedness I knew,
> When first I saw the Lord?
> Where is that soul-refreshing view
> Of Jesus and his Word?"

—Others are longing for the "latter." Their salvation is nearer than when they believed. But they do not yet feel as they wish. They want more faith, more hope, more consolation—more of all the fulness of God. Let the last showers descend; and the appointed weeks of harvest come; and the produce be brought home, with "shoutings, Grace, grace unto it!"

AUGUST 21.

'*Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.*' John xi. 3.

THESE words furnish several sources of remark and instruction.

The first regards the *love* of Jesus. In his love to Lazarus, there was something peculiar, and something common. He loved him with a partial, and he loved him with a divine affection. To know Christ after the flesh, is a privilege which has long since ceased; and to be loved by him under the advantage of his humanity, was a favour restricted to few. But there is, however, another sense in which, as he loved Lazarus, so he loves us: and though we share not in the partial regard of the friend, we are the subjects of the divine regard of the Saviour. This love commenced from no excellency in us, like the love of creatures. It took knowledge of us, as sinners. It began before the foundation of the world. It led him to espouse our cause, and brought him under an engagement to suffer and die for us—His people remember this love more than wine.

The second regards the *affliction* of Lazarus—He "was sick." Sickness is one of the common calamities of life; and it is one of the most painful and trying. Yet Lazarus was exercised with it, though he was loved of Jesus. This explains the nature of his love, and shows us that it does not exempt its subjects from distress. It is not the foolish fondness of a father, who, when correction is necessary, spares the child for his crying. He that thus "spareth the rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him, chastens him betimes." Could we now see, as we shall hereafter, the principle, the design, the alleviations, the advantages of the afflictions of the righteous, we should perceive that they are not only compatible with Divine love, but the fruit, the proof of it. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

The third regards the *mission* of the sisters—"Therefore the sisters *sent* unto Jesus." Their affliction led to this application. To induce us to send to him is the design of our trials; for we are too forgetful of him in ease and prosperity—"In their affliction they will seek me early." What can we do without him then? Therefore, says the Teacher, as well as the Chastiser, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." And what a solace! what a relief! what a source of support, sanctification and deliverance, is prayer! John's disciples therefore, when their master was beheaded, not only took up the body and buried it, but "went and told Jesus." "I will say unto God," was the resolve of Job, "do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me." And, says David, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Thus it has been with all who have *heard* the rod—They have all said, "A glorious high throne from the beginning has been the place of our sanctuary."

Therefore his *sisters* sent unto him. It is

pleasing when, in our natural relations, we have spiritual friends who will carry our cases, and spread them before the Lord. Many in their sickness have connexions about them, who are kind and attentive; but they never speak a word to them of their souls; and never administer to them the cordials of the Gospel, though they often apply self-righteous opiates to stupify conscience. They send for the physician and the lawyer, but do not address the Saviour for them. But some, like Lazarus, have those who will bear them upon their minds, and call in the aid of the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof, in the time of trouble. And what an encouragement and comfort is this to those who are scarcely able to lift a thought to God for themselves; whose broken and distracted petitions seem unworthy of notice; and who know that the prayer of the righteous availeth much!

The fourth is, the *message* they conveyed to him—"Saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." From hence we may learn two things.—First. The Lord's love gives us encouragement in prayer, and furnishes us with our most prevailing plea in dealing with him. They do not say, he whom *we* love—though this was true. Nor he who loves *thee*—though this was true: but, he whom *thou* lovest. How wise, how expressive, was this! As much as to say, "Hast not thou deigned to regard him already? Has not thy kindness for him raised our confidence in thee, and our expectation from thee? Will not others turn their eyes towards thee, and see whether thy friendship is like the friendship of the world, which leaves its dependents in the hour of necessity and distress?" "A true friend loveth at all times; but is born for adversity." We read of pleading with God; and filling our mouth with arguments. Our most suitable and successful ones must be derived from himself, and especially from his own goodness. "I plead nothing of my own—not even my love to thee:

> 'Yet I love thee, and adore:
> O for grace to love thee more!'

But my love to thee is weak and cold; and whatever it be, it is the effect of thy love to me. I was once a stranger, and an enemy, and should have remained so still, hadst not thou found a way into my heart. But thou hast redeemed me by thy blood. Thou hast called me by thy grace. Thou hast opened my blind eyes; and turned my feet into the path of peace. And after all this love, wilt thou cast me off? Couldst thou not have destroyed me, without showing me such things as these!"

Secondly. It is better for us, when we seek the Lord for temporal things, to refer our suit to his own good pleasure. I admire the manner in which these pious women addressed him. They do not prescribe—they hardly petition—they particularize nothing. They do not say, Lord, come to his house—Come immediately—Remove his malady—What will become of us, if Lazarus should die! But they state the case—and leave it: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." When, therefore, we have to pray for deliverance from some trouble, or the acquisition of some outward favour, let us do it with modesty and reserve. For these blessings are promised, not absolutely, but conditionally; that is, if they are good for us: and in the very same way they are to be implored. We must not desire them, if they would be hurtful; and they may be injurious: and God perfectly knows whether this would be the result of success and indulgence. Had the Jews prayed in this manner, for flesh, he would not have given them their heart's desire; and sent leanness into their souls. What we extort, as it were, from God, by restless importunity, turns the blessing into a curse. The feverish and inflamed state of the mind, renders the gratification of the craving dangerous. We cannot be too earnest with God about spiritual blessings: but as to every thing of a temporal nature, temperance of mind becomes us, and, in resignation at his feet, we must endeavour to say—"Here I am; let him do what seemeth him good.

> 'Assure me of thy wondrous love,
> Immeasurably kind:
> And, Lord, to thine unerring will
> Be every wish resigned.'"

AUGUST 22.

"*The word of Christ.*"—Col. iii. 16.

So the Scriptures are called—because he is the author; and—because he is the subject of their contents. They are not only derived from the inspiration of his Spirit; but they are full of his person, and character, and sufferings, and glory. There is nothing, perhaps, admitted into them but has some relation to him. We cannot, in many instances, trace this connexion at present: but we shall see more of it when, in the Church, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven fold, as the light of seven days. And, perhaps to explore it perfectly, will be a part of the blessedness and employment of heaven. But when our Lord urged his hearers to search the Scriptures, he said "They are they that testify of *me*." And going to Emmaus with the two disciples, "he expounded unto them, in *all* the Scriptures, the things concerning *himself*."

We may divide the Scriptures into six parts.

There is the *historical* part. He is the substance of this. In Adam, we see him the head and representative of his people. In Noah, as the restorer of a new world. In

Isaac, as a victim laid on the altar. In Joseph, as a sufferer and a saviour. In Moses, as a law-giver. In Aaron, as a high priest. In Joshua, as a leader and commander. In Solomon, as the prince of peace. In Jonah, as buried, and rising from the grave.

There is the *ceremonial* part. Of this, he is the substance. He is the body of all its shadows, the reality of all its types. He is the rock, whose streams followed the Israel of God. He is the manna, the true bread that came down from heaven. In the City of Refuge, we behold him as our security from avenging justice. And in every bleeding sacrifice, as the atonement of our sins.

There is the *prophetical* part. Here he is all in all. "To him gave *all* the prophets witness." "The testimony of Jesus, is the *spirit* of prophecy."

There is the *promissory* part—And how large and glorious a portion of it is filled with exceeding great and precious promises! What blessing can we need, that is not furnished under the pledge of a God that cannot lie! "But all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

There is the *practical* part. To be a Christian, is, to live, not to ourselves, but to him that died for us, and rose again. Of good works, his example is the rule; his love is the motive; his Spirit is the author. He is the altar on which all our sacrifices are to be offered. Prayer is asking in his name. We are to love our wives, even as he loved the Church, and gave himself for it.

There is the *doctrinal* part. And what is the great mystery of godliness? "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Every doctrine of the Gospel, as treated by the inspired authors, leads to him. If we are justified, it is by his righteousness. If we are sanctified, it is by his Spirit. If the glory of God shines forth, it is in the face of Jesus Christ. Providence is, all power given unto him in heaven and in earth. The whole of Christianity is called, "The truth as it is in Jesus."

Take him out of the Bible, and you take the sun out of our world; and the soul out of the body.

It is this that so powerfully endears the sacred Volume to every real Christian. It is the word of One he supremely loves; and of One he feels to be infinitely necessary to all his comfort, and all his hope. Of him he can never read, or hear, enough.

O my soul! let this word of Christ dwell in thee richly in all wisdom. Never forget the admonition of kindness, as well as of authority; "Bind it continually upon thine heart, and tie it about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee."

AUGUST 23.

"Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it."—Psalm xxxvii. 34.

Here is a twofold admonition.

First. "Wait on the Lord." "I hope to do so." But are you *sure* of this? Is there any thing in your religious exercises that really deserves the name of waiting on God? For persons may read without attention, and hear without faith, and sing without praise, and pray without desire. They may draw nigh to him with the mouth, and honour him with the lip, while the heart is far from him. But God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.—"I hope I do *thus* wait on him." But do you thus wait on him *sufficiently?* In the sanctuary? In the family? In the closet? In all your concerns—like David, who said, "On thee do I wait all the day, Lord!"

Secondly. "And keep his way." This is beautifully connected with the former. Wait—and work. Wait—and walk. Get grace—and exercise it. Persevere in the use of means, if present comfort be withholden. Neither give up the course in which you are engaged—nor turn aside—nor stand still—nor look back—nor seem to come short; though superiors frown—and companions reproach—and iniquity abounds—and the love of many waxes cold—and numbers walk no more with you. In all opposition, and through every discouragement, let your soul follow hard after God. Thus did Job; and therefore he could say, "My foot hath held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips: I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." So it was also with the Church. "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death." We have enough to animate us to hold on—"After two days will he revive us: in the third day will he raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

Here is a twofold promise.

First. "He shall exalt thee to inherit the land." God is the source of all eleva-

tion and honour. He raised the Jews to the possession of Canaan, the glory of all lands. He dignifies Christians with a title to a better, even a heavenly country; where, "with kings, are they upon the throne." He advances them here, as well as hereafter. For he is "the glory of their strength, and in his favour their horn is exalted." And he exalts them not only with regard to spiritual, but temporal things. For "the meek shall inherit the earth." Not that all of them are rich and great in the world. So far from it, they are commonly a poor and an afflicted people. Not that every thing is actually in their possession, or that they have a civil right to it. Dominion is not founded in grace: but security is; peace is; contentment is; happiness is. And as to covenant interest, and enjoyment, and improvement, "all things are theirs."

Secondly. "When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it." And they will be cut off. They are often cut off, even in life, from their places, and riches, and prospects. At death they are cut off from all their possessions and comforts: for, poor as their portion here is,

> "'Tis all the happiness they know."

Yet, they are then cut off from all the means of grace, and the hopes of mercy. In the last day they will be cut off from "the resurrection of life;" and before the assembled world, they will hear the Judge irreversibly excluding them from himself, the source of all happiness—"*Depart*, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels."

Dreadful as the ruin is, there is nothing in it to alarm the *praying* and *persevering* believer. He will have no share in it. The vengeance that falls and crushes the foe, will not, cannot touch the friend. He will only be a spectator; and strange as it may now seem, the sight will not affect his happiness. But is it necessary to go further; and represent it as a source of pleasure and delight? Surely it is enough that he will see it, and adore the mercy that graciously saved him: and *acquiesce* in the justice that righteously condemns others.

As the saint will only see the destruction of the wicked; so the sinner will see the salvation of the righteous, and not partake of it. But to see such a blessedness; to see what was once within his own reach, and is now enjoyed by others, must be a source of the keenest anguish. Such was the display of plenty to the interdicted nobleman at the gate of Samaria: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes: but thou shalt not eat thereof." And we know who has said, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."

AUGUST 24.

"*Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.*"—Zech. xiii. 7.

We know who this Shepherd was. God speaks of him in the former part of the verse, as "his fellow;" and calls him "his shepherd." He was God's shepherd, because he appointed him to take the charge of his Church, and to perform, on their behalf, all the duties implied in the pastoral office. Hence it was foretold of him, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." This character the Saviour applied to himself, with an attribute of distinction: "I am the good shepherd." Paul styles him, "that great shepherd of the sheep." Peter calls him, "the chief shepherd," and "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls."—Let the language of my heart be—"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.

> 'Tis there, with the lambs of thy flock,
> There only I covet to rest;
> To lie at the foot of the rock,
> Or rise to be hid in thy breast:
> 'Tis there I would always abide,
> Nor ever a moment depart;
> Preserv'd evermore at thy side,
> Eternally hid in thine heart.'

He was to be "smitten." Every one that enters this vale of tears is a sufferer. But he was "a man of sorrows;" and could say, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the *Lord* hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." For, though he suffered from devils, who had their hour and power of darkness; and though he suffered from men, for, against him, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together—yet it was only to do whatsoever *his* hand and *his* counsel determined before to be done. It pleased the *Lord* to bruise him. *He* put him to grief. When, therefore, the Jews esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, they were right in the fact, but mistaken in the cause. They supposed he suffered for guilt; and he did thus suffer; but the guilt was not his own. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed." Here let me contemplate the evil of sin in the sufferings of this divine Victim. And here let me dwell on that love, which passeth knowledge, that

led him, all-innocent as he was, voluntarily to become a sacrifice on our behalf; and to suffer, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. The glory of the Gospel; the hope of the sinner; the triumph of the believer—all lies here—"It is Christ that died."

It was a sad thing that his own disciples should abandon him, at the very moment he was going to die for them, and after all their professions of determined adherence to him. But when the shepherd was smitten, "the sheep were scattered." In this desertion, he was not taken by surprise; for he had previously said, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." Yet how much he felt it, may be inferred from his lamentation and complaint: "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforter, but I found none." Let not his people count it a strange thing, if they are betrayed or forsaken. It should remind them of the fellowship of his sufferings.

But behold an instance of forgiving mercy and renewing grace—"And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." His disciples were little in the eyes of the world; and less in their own. They were few in number, and poor in condition. They were weak in faith and fortitude; and were now dismayed, and desponding. But he did not give them over unto death. He knew their frame; he remembered that they were dust. As soon as he was risen from the dead, he appeared to them—not clothed in terror, but saying, "Peace be unto you." He exerted again the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit. He renewed them again unto repentance. He established their faith and hope. He gave them enlarged views, and fresh courage: so that they were ready to suffer and die for his name.

Surely a bruised reed will he not break; and smoking flax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

AUGUST 25.

"O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."—Psalm lxv. 2.

We have no claims upon God; and are not worthy of the least of all his mercies. It is therefore surprising that he should hear prayer at all. But he glories in it; and by nothing is he so much distinguished. He derives his fame, his character, from it—"O thou that hearest prayer!"

And we need not wonder at this, when we consider—How *constantly* he has heard prayer; even ever since men began to call upon the name of the Lord.—And how *many* prayers he has heard. If we are to pray without ceasing, the prayers of one individual will be very numerous. What, then, is the aggregate multitude, that has been offered by all the millions that ever sought his face!—And how *largely* he answers prayer. He gives grace and glory, and withholds no good thing pertaining to life and godliness.—And how *readily* he answers prayer. "Before they call," says he, "I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."—And how *certainly* he hears prayer. We have his promises, which are firmer than the earth and the heavens. It may not be easy to ascertain when, or how, he answers us, as the God of our salvation: but this we know, that he cannot deny us, without denying himself. He cannot lie: and he has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

What should be the influence of this glorious truth? "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." If these words had stood separately, we should have taken them as affirming, that all flesh would come to him at the last day to be judged. But the reference is not to God on the judgment-seat, but on the mercy-seat: and it is well that we can kneel at the latter, before we can stand at the former. The meaning is, that men shall seek to him in *prayer*. And not some, but *many*. Not many, but *all*. Surely here is nothing less than a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles. Not only shall the seed of Jacob, his chosen, seek unto him; but those also that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world, crying only unto idols that could not save. The Jews, in latter times, were carnal, and selfish, and averse to the extension of their privileges: but the more ancient and spiritual of their nation rejoiced in the prospect of it. And they had intimations from the beginning, that the Gentiles, also, should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ, by the Gospel—"All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee." "My house shall be called the house of prayer for all people."

If the practice here insured is to result from the character here expressed, the character must be known. "For how can they call upon him, in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe on him, of whom they have not heard?" Accordingly, it is said, "From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering."

And, to notice this more personally, we see of what importance it is to entertain encou-

raging views of God. Confidence in his mercy and grace, will alone draw us into his presence. And therefore the ground of this confidence must be firm and obvious.

Much advantage, also, upon this principle, must result from reviews of our own experience of his goodness. All success is animating, especially in prayer. "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

—Let *me* come to him among *all* those that are coming. And let me come immediately. For there is a time when he will not hear prayer. "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

AUGUST 26.

"Yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindnesses, and in mercies."—Hosea ii. 19.

In the covenant of grace, there is God's part, and there is our part. But God—or it would never be accomplished, undertakes for the latter as well as the former. He engages to do all that is necessary *for* his people, and —*in* them.

Here is the *nature* of the connexion he will establish with them—"I will *betroth* thee unto me." And the *manner* of it—"In *righteousness*, and in *judgment*, and in *lovingkindnesses*, and in *mercies*."

First. I will do it, says He—in *righteousness*. He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. But the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Righteousness, therefore, seems to require that he should punish them, rather than admit them into his favour. And awakened souls want to see a way in which God is just, as well as the justifier. And he has provided for this; and he tells us in the Gospel, that though sin is pardoned, it is also condemned; and that though the transgressor escapes, the curse falls upon another, who, by bearing it himself, redeems us from it, and is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The law, therefore, instead of being injured, is magnified, and made honourable; and even more glorified than it would have been by the destruction of the sinner. In the sinner's destruction, justice would have been always satisfying, but never satisfied. Whereas the satisfaction was now completed at once, "by the one offering up of himself." Then also justice would only have been displayed passively; but now it is displayed actively too. Then, it would have been displayed only in them; but now, it is also displayed by them. Then, they would have hated, and cursed it for ever; now, they love it, and delight to extol it. For righteousness here is not to be taken only for the way in which he makes the guilty just, but the way in which he makes the depraved holy. This comes from the same gracious agency; and is equally necessary with the former; as he could not admit them to communion with himself while in a state of sin—For "how can two walk together except they be agreed?" And "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?"

Secondly. In *judgment*. The heathens placed Mercury, the god of wisdom, by the side of Venus, the goddess of marriage: and for good reason; since there is nothing in which judgment is so needful. Yet few things are entered upon with so little discretion and reflection. Hence the wretched consequences that ensue. What can be expected from those hasty and thoughtless matches, in which adaptation, age, temper, and even piety, are all overlooked?—But the Lord is a God of knowledge: he knows what he does; and why he does it. He has reasons, which justify the measure to his own infinite understanding. Hence salvation is called his counsel; in which also he is said to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence. And this is true, not only as to the contriving and procuring of it; but also as to the applying. The place, the time, the manner, the means of their conversion, will all evince, when known that his work is perfect, and his ways judgment. We see but little of this now. Yet there are openings into it which carry the mind away in contemplation and surprise; and which assure us much more remains for our discovery and rapture in the world of light. This applies also to his people, as well as to God. Their choosing him, and consenting to his gracious proposals, will bear examination. It is wisdom: and wisdom which is justified of all her children. The world may censure; but they are able to give a reason of the hope that is in them. The spiritual judgeth all things, though he himself is judged of no man.

Thirdly. In *lovingkindness*. Without this, it were better for persons never to come together. The parties mutually need it; and need it daily. They should be filled with tenderness, to bear and sympathize with each other; and the law of kindness should rule in all their looks, words, and actions. This is seldom wanting on the female side. Their love is not only more pure and disinterested; but more fervent and undeclining; and better prepared to endure privations and sacrifices. Men are fond of power and authority; and therefore they are commanded, not to govern them—this they will do readily enough; but to love their wives, and not to be bitter against them. God says to his Church; "You shall find me full of tenderness and compassion. I know your frame, and remember that you are dust. I will pity your infirmities, and spare you. If I afflict, it shall not be willingly. If

I chide, I will not contend for ever. I will look to the heart, and judge you according to your meaning, and your desires."—It would seem strange to apply the exercise of this quality to *them*, as well as to Him. Kindness towards God seems too low an expression; but he himself has sanctioned it; "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Every thing they do for him, he takes kind at their hand: and their ingenuous disposition will make them fearful of grieving his holy Spirit; and anxious to walk "worthy of him unto all pleasing."

Fourthly. In *mercies*. This is distinguishable from the former. *That* was the effect; *this* shows the cause; and it is mentioned, in addition to lovingkindness, to remind us that all we possess, or expect, springs solely from the free and undeserved grace of God; and also to meet those discouragements to which we are always liable, from a sense of our unworthiness and ill-deservings. There is not a just man on earth that liveth and sinneth not. In many things we offend all. What humiliations must a Christian feel, when he reviews even his Sabbaths, and holy communions! and when he compares his proficiency with his obligations and advantages! But God will not cast away his people; but have mercy upon them according to the *multitude* of his *tender* mercies. This is children's bread; and the children of God will not, cannot abuse it. Yea, the more they are persuaded of this truth, the more holy, and cheerful, and vigorous they will be in the performance of duty. Grass that grows in orchards, and under trees, is of a sour quality: it wants the sun. Fruits that grow in the sun are richer and riper than those which grow in the shade. The best frame we can be in, is to be upholden by a free spirit, and to act under a full sense of our divine privileges. Let us therefore sing of the mercy of the Lord for ever, and if he ever *seems* to have forgotten to be gracious, let us plead with him, and say, "Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me! Are they restrained?"—Here again the import includes, not only that we receive mercy, but exercise it, not towards Him personally—this is impossible, and he needs it not. But his creatures need it; his people need it. And what is done to them, he will consider as done to himself. And what so just and proper, as that they who are forgiven, should forgive! And that they who live by mercy, should be merciful!

AUGUST 27.

'—*Heirs*."—Titus iii. 7.

If we properly observe those who are

Christians indeed, we shall find in them a peculiarity that distinguishes them from, and an importance that ranks them above, all other creatures. What an assemblage of qualities, excellences, and advantages, must they possess, to do any thing like justice to the various and numberless representations, by which they are held forth to our view and admiration in the Scriptures of Truth! Let me contemplate them under the character of *heirs*!

As such, we may consider them *in the grandeur of their estate*. A man may be an heir to a cottage, or a large domain, or even a throne. But what is the inheritance of Christians! In one place they are called "heirs, according to promise." In another, "heirs of the grace of life." In another, "heirs, according to the hope of eternal life." In another, "heirs of salvation." In another, "heirs of the kingdom, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Paul prays that the Ephesians may be enlightened to know it; and speaks of "the hope of their calling;" and "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." The inheritance of the worldling, who has his portion in this life; the inheritance of the Jew, in Canaan; the inheritance of Adam, in Paradise; the inheritance of angels, in heaven; all come far short of the believer's expectation. At present, it cannot be fully either described or conceived—It doth not yet appear what we shall be.

We may consider them in the *solidity of their title*. No person ever had a claim to an estate so clear and decisive as the Christian has to his inheritance. He may not, indeed, be certain of it in his own mind. There is a difference between a right, and the perception of it. An heir, by reason of his tender age, or infirmity, or disorder, may be unconscious of what awaits him. And Christians may be ignorant and fearful. They may condemn themselves, when God has justified them freely from all things: and they may conclude that they have no part nor lot in the matter, while yet their title is as valid as the word and oath of God can make it. It is also perfectly inseparable from the birth that makes them new creatures; for they are born of God; and, "if children, then heirs; and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ;" and, being one with him, their heirship is as undeniable as his.

We may view them, also, in the *certainty of their possession*. An heir who has had the clearest and fullest title to an estate, has yet never enjoyed it. To take possession of it, perhaps he had to cross the sea, and was wrecked. Or he travelled by land, and was murdered. Or, in reaching maturity, he fell a prey to one of the many diseases to which humanity is liable. Or, if *he* was preserved, the estate was destroyed: for there is no

place of security on earth. Or, if the estate was not destroyed, it was *usurped*, and, by fraud and villany, alienated from its lawful owner. How many figure away, only in the rights of others! But what shall hinder the Christian from realizing his hope? His inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him, where danger never comes. And the heir is as safe as the estate; being "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

But observe these heirs in the circumstances of their *minority*. For there is a period of nonage: and "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father." Before this season arrives, he must submit to many restraints, not pleasant to his feelings, and the reasons of which he cannot fully appreciate. Yea, there may be cases in which he may even be constrained to borrow from a domestic or neighbour, who has none of his expectancy. And Christians must not reckon that their present indulgences will equal their future reversions. They are now under a course of discipline, in which they must exercise self-denial, and appear less favoured than many around them. But they rejoice in hope—and not only so—but, as the heir has something more from his estate than the prospect of it; as he has education and attendance becoming his rank; and remittances, to enable him to live answerable to his destination: so Christians have now supplies from their riches in glory; and are training up, under a divine teacher, for the sublime spheres they are to fill; and their ministering spirits do always behold the face of our heavenly Father.

And what is *the deportment that becomes these heirs?* It ought to be ennobled. Holiness is the true dignity of the soul; and sin, its vilest degradation. They are, therefore, to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but rather reprove them" —And, oh! the infinite delicacy of the Gospel! They are to "abstain from the very appearance of evil." It ought to be humble and grateful. They were, by nature, only children of wrath. If their relation is glorious, it is derived entirely from grace. There were difficulties in the way of their adoption, which God alone could remove—"I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage?" But he removed these obstacles by the sacrifice of his own Son, and the renovation of his own Spirit; and, poor and vile as they were, he raised up the poor out of the dust, and lifted the needy from the dunghill, to set them with princes, even the princes of his people. It ought to be very cheerful and happy—

> "A hope so much divine,
> May trials well endure."

But so inferior are natural things to spiritual, that, when the one are applied to the illustration of the other, they teach us as much by contrast as by comparison. What, then, *is the difference between these* and earthly heirs! In other cases, the inheritance is diminished by the numbers of co-heirs. Here, the multitude of partakers, instead of injuring, increases the blessedness of each possessor. In other cases, the father dies before the child inherits. Here, the Father never dies. In other cases, the heir by dying loses his inheritance. Here, by dying, he gains it; it is then he comes of age. In other cases, an estate passes from hand to hand. Here, is no succession: it is our heritage for ever. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

AUGUST 28.

"Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away." Psalm lxv. 3.

This is the language of complaint and of triumph. It was uttered by a Jew; but every Christian can make it his own. For as, in water, face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man, in every age, and under every dispensation.

As to the complaint, there are two ways in which iniquities may prevail against the Christian. The first is in the growing sense of his guilt. This may be occasioned by afflictions, which bring our sins to remembrance; or by any thing that increases self-knowledge; for this must always show us more of our unworthiness and depravity. Suppose a man in a dungeon, abounding with noxious reptiles. While all is dark there, he sees none of them; but as the light dawns, he begins to see them; and, as the light increases, he sees more of them. The light seems to bring them, and to multiply them; but it only discovers what was there before. Some pray that God would show them all the corruptions of their heart; but this would probably drive them into distraction or despair. They could not bear the whole disclosure, especially at first; and therefore they are made sensible of them by little and little.

The second is in the power of their acting. This prevalence cannot be entire; for sin shall not have dominion over them: but it may be occasional and partial. An enemy may make a temporary irruption, and do injury, though he may soon be expelled again. In a war, checks and discomfitures are not incompatible with general and final success; as we see in the history of the Romans. The Israelites were repulsed at Ai; but they returned to the assault, with more caution and wisdom, and succeeded. And thus, whatever advantages the foe may gain *against* Chris-

tians, the God of peace will bruise Satan under their feet, shortly. David does not say, Iniquities prevail *with* me; but *against* me. As to many, they prevail with them. *They* drink in iniquity, as the ox drinketh in water. *They* draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope. But a Christian is made willing in the day of God's power; and therefore can say, "To will is present with me: but how to perform that which is good, I find not. When I *would* do good, evil is present with me." Ahab is said to have sold himself to work wickedness. But it is otherwise with a poor slave in Africa. He is kidnapped or taken by force, and disposed of to some demon-trafficker in flesh and blood. He resists, and weeps; but they prevail *against* him. And, says Paul, I do not sell myself, but I am sold under sin—So then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me—O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me! Poison in a serpent never produces sickness; but it does in a man: it is natural to the one, but not to the other. Sin does not distress the sinner; but it offends, beyond every thing else, the renewed mind.

The words are broken and abrupt: but when the Church adds—"As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away;" they are, assuredly, the triumph of faith, after a plunge of distress, and a pause of thoughtfulness. There are two ways, according to the Scripture, in which God purges our transgressions; and they always go together. The one is, by pardoning mercy. Thus David prays, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Thus the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. And they that believe on him are justified from all things.

The other is, by sanctifying grace. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." And this is as much the work of God as the former. He subdues our iniquities, as well as forgives them. He not only ordains peace for us, but works all our works in us.

The Christian is *persuaded* of his gracious deliverance; and therefore expresses himself with confidence. And a foundation is laid for this confidence; and such a firm and scriptural foundation, as that he may feel himself perfectly safe in the midst of danger. Under the deepest sense of his desert, he may joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he has now received the atonement, and, with regard to all the conflicts of indwelling sin, he may take courage, and sing—"I shall not die, but live; and declare the works of the Lord.

My spirit holds perpetual war,
And wrestles and complains;
But views the happy moment near
That shall dissolve its chains.

Cheerful in death I close my eyes,
To part with every lust;
And charge my flesh, whene'er it rise,
To leave them in the dust.'"

AUGUST 29.

"*So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*"—Gal. iii. 9.

The outward distinctions of life awaken the envy of some, and gender discontents in others. And yet how little depends upon them! All that is essential to the real welfare, and chief happiness of man, lies open to all who choose to avail themselves of it. All cannot become scholars; but all may be made wise unto salvation. All cannot acquire wealth; but all may gain the unsearchable riches of Christ. All cannot walk upon the high places of the earth; but all may be great in the sight of the Lord. Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, was considered the most dignified and indulged of the human race: yet every Christian, however poor and despised, stands related to this extraordinary character, and is blessed with him—"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." And how was he blessed?

He was *justified*. And blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. For him there is no wrath to come; no sting in death; no curse in affliction. But came this blessedness upon Abraham only? "What saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." So then they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham—And are all authorized to say, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Abraham was called the *friend of God;* and was called so by God himself: "Thou, Israel, art my servant Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." If Eusebius held it such a privilege to be the friend of Pamphilius: if Lord Brookes so gloried in the distinction as to have it inscribed upon his tomb—

"Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sidney"—

What was the honour of Abraham in being acknowledged the friend of God? Yet such

honour have all the saints. They are not only pardoned, but admitted to intimacy. They walk with God. His secret is with them; and he shows them his covenant. In all their afflictions he is afflicted. He loveth at all times: and will never leave nor forsake them. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

Abraham also was blessed with *usefulness*. "I will bless thee," says God, "and make thee a blessing." This was done not only in the descent of the Messiah from him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed eventually; but by his prayers, and instructions, and example, and exertions, and influence, wherever he came. Thus also are all believers blessed. Not one of them is useless. They are disposed to do good; and their desire is gratified. They are qualified to do good; and as stewards of the manifold grace of God, they serve their generation by his will. They are the salt of the earth, to preserve; the light of the world, to inform; and a dew from the Lord, and as showers upon the grass, to cool, and refresh, and revive, and fertilize—"I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing."

Abraham was *divinely protected:* and God said to him, "I am thy shield." "I will bless him that blesseth thee; and I will curse him that curseth thee." He preserved him in his going out and coming in. He covered his head in the day of battle, when he rescued his kinsman Lot. He suffered no man to do him wrong; yea, he reproved kings for his sake, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophet no harm. And thus, though many rise up against believers, and they feel themselves to be perfect weakness; their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. He is their refuge and strength; a very present and all-sufficient help in trouble. They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: therefore they need not fear what their enemies can do unto them.

Abraham had not only a divine protection, but an *infinite portion:* "I am," says God, "not only 'thy shield,' but 'thy exceeding great reward!'" This necessarily includes what God was to do for him beyond the grave. It could not have been fulfilled in this life. When we find him, a few years only after this assurance, sickening and dying, and laid in the cave of Machpelah; we are constrained to ask, Is this the reward, the great, the exceeding great reward, consisting, so to speak, of God himself! Ages after this God said to Moses at the bush, I *am*—not I was—but I *am* the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The relation, therefore, remained; for "he is not the God of the dead, but of the living." They were then living, as to their spirits; and would as certainly live as to their bodies in the resurrection, as if it had already taken place. Hence the reasoning of the Apostle; "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." Our Saviour also allowed him to be in glory; and even represented heaven by a union and intimacy with him: "The beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." And nothing less than this is the glad and glorious destination of every believer. For they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

The grand inquiry therefore is—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" For we have access only by *faith* into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

For they that are not of faith are cursed with—the faithless nobleman, to whom it was denounced, "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not taste of it"—And with the faithless Jews, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness; and who "could not enter in because of unbelief"—And "with hypocrites and unbelievers, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

AUGUST 30.

"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."—1 Peter i. 17.

From these words, I might consider the nature of the Christian life—which is *a sojourning here:* and also—the *time* appointed for it. But let me rather reflect upon the *manner* in which I am to pass the one, in accomplishing the other—"Pass the time of your sojourning here *in fear.*" This cannot intend every kind of fear, without making the Scripture inconsistent with itself: for how often does it forbid fear!

We must not, therefore, give way to apprehensions of any thing we may suffer from our fellow-creatures, in following the path of duty. Here we should boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me." "Fear not," says the Saviour—mentioning the extremest case, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." And this Paul exemplified: "None of these things move me: neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." When Peter and John were threatened if they spake any more in the name of Jesus, they replied, We have nothing to de

with consequences: we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard: we ought to obey God rather than man: and he has commanded us to preach the Gospel to every creature. So should it be with us. We are not, indeed, to run into sufferings for our religion; but we can never go on well in divine things till we are delivered from the fear of man that bringeth a snare. What is it but this that produces so many concealments, and defections, and inconsistencies in those who know what is right, and are excited by their convictions; but have not courage enough to resolve and proceed! Perfect love casteth out this fear.

We are equally to shun a distrustfulness of God's word. This fear is at once the most dishonourable to God, and injurious to our own souls. It robs us of comfort, and lays open the mind to temptation; as we see in Abraham, who, in a moment of unbelief, prevaricated, and debased and exposed himself in Gerar. Having the assurance of God in any case, we should feel no uncertainty as to the result; it must be accomplished; we have something firmer than the earth and the heavens to rely upon. But we may fear, not—whether we shall perish in the way everlasting; but whether we are in it. Not—whether the promise will fail; but whether we are the heirs of promise. This the Apostle even admonishes—"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." This is a case too important to be taken for granted. The consequences of mistake are remediless; and the possibility, yea, the probability of it is great. It will, therefore, be better to err rather on the side of solicitude, than of security.

A servile fear, too, is not to be cherished. This may, indeed, precede something better: but if our fear of God begins with the judge, it must end with the father. It argues a very low degree of religion when a man can only be held to duty, like the slave, by the dread of the lash. We have not, says the Apostle, received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption. The slave is converted into the child: and God spares him as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

But there is a proper and all-important fear, which God has engaged to put into the hearts of his people, that they may not depart from him—It is a fear of respect, and esteem, and gratitude. It regards not only God's greatness, but his goodness. There is, therefore, nothing irksome in it. It is compatible with consolation and joy; and the first Christians walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. It is, in reality, the same with affection: it is the love which an inferior bears to a superior; the love of a dutiful child to a parent; or of a good servant to a master; or of a thankful dependent to a benefactor. This shows itself much in a way of reverence, and obedience, and attention. Hence, the more I love God, the more I shall fear him; the more I shall dread to offend him; the more I shall study to please him; the more I shall ask, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? the more I shall pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."

There is, also, a fear of caution, in which it becomes us to live. This regards sin. Sin is the greatest evil to which we can be exposed. And we may see enough in the case of David to make even a good man stand in dread of it. For though God put away his sin, as to its future penalty, yet it was ever before him in the sufferings it occasioned. The sword never departed from his house. He was filled with dread of divine abandonment. He was deprived of his peace and joy. His bones were broken; and his tongue was struck dumb. And a holy God will always cause the backslidings even of his own people to reprove them, and make them know that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against him. He will becloud their hope, and destroy their comfort, and perhaps quarter troubles upon them for life. Reputation, which is the produce of years, may be ruined in a moment; and the effect of a thousand good actions may be lost by one evil deed. He who has befriended religion may cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, and become a judgment on the whole neighbourhood in which he dwells.

And are *we* in no danger of this? Read the Scriptures. See the falls of good men; and men eminently good. Have not we a subtle and active enemy always at hand? Have we not a wicked world without us? Have we not an evil heart within us! Owing to our remaining depravity, are we not liable to be ensnared by every thing we come in contact with, however harmless in itself? If we *think* caution unnecessary, we have the *greatest* need of it; for "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Be not highminded, but fear.

If we would maintain this frame of mind, let us walk circumspectly; not as fools, but as wise. Let us not be anxious to rise in the world, and gain the affluence which will require a moral miracle to preserve us. "He that makes *haste* to be rich, shall not be innocent." "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while

some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

—Let us keep our mouth with a bridle. In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin.

—Let us not run into perils, uncalled of God—We are only authorized to look for his protection when we are brought into them in the discharge of duty. And, while we watch, let us also constantly pray—"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT FEARETH ALWAYS."

AUGUST 31.

"*I will betroth thee unto me for ever.*"
Hosea ii. 19.

How well is it said of Christians, "Ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." They are not only pardoned, but employed in his service. They are not only reconciled, but admitted into friendship and intimacy. Yea, they are not only friends and favourites, but they are his bride—"I will betroth thee unto me." And observe the permanency of the relation: "I will betroth thee unto me for ever."

"Permanency," says the Poet, "adds bliss to bliss." How is every possession and enjoyment without it impaired in value! Yea, the more important any acquisition be, and the more necessary we feel it to our happiness, the more alive are we to apprehension of danger; the more averse are we to absence; the more painful is separation; the more intolerable is the thought of loss.

Yet to whatever we are attached here, do we not set our "hearts on that which is not?" It is said the Jews, in their nuptial ceremony, always threw a glass upon the ground, to signify that the union then forming was as frail as the emblem was brittle. Without the figure there is enough, if we are wise, to remind us of the fact: and well does the Apostle reason, when he says, "Brethren, the time is short; it remains, therefore, that they who have wives be as though they had none."

We take each other—"till death us do part." And the relation *is* terminated by death—not the death of *both*—but the death of *either*. What then is the tenure of the treasure? What is our life? It is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Has God given you a companion in the days of your vanity? Rejoice; but rejoice with trembling. Perhaps already the wife has been called to give up "the guide of her youth;" or the husband, "the desire of his eyes;" with whom they once took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company!

But Christians can never be in a widowed state. They can never lose their defence, their glory, their joy. There is nothing precarious in the transactions of God with his people. "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, and nothing can be taken from it." How delightful in a world of changes to know that *He* changeth not, and therefore that we shall not be consumed. Every thing seems reeling around me, and sinking beneath my feet: but I have hold of something firmer than the heavens and the earth. It is the word, the oath of eternal Faithfulness and Truth. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed: but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." I have had many a persuasion which has failed me, because, though the confidence was strong, the foundation was weak. But here the full assurance of faith can never do justice to the certainty of the event. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

SEPTEMBER 1.

"*The word of life.*"—Phil. ii. 16.

THIS is a representation of the Gospel; and it well deserves our notice. All life is valuable; but there are several kinds of it, rising above each other. There is vegetable life. This is superior to mere matter; as a tree is more excellent than a stone. There is animal life. This is superior to vegetable; as a bird excels a tree. There is rational life. This is superior to animal; as a man excels a bird: for man was made a little lower only than the angels; there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. Yet there is a life superior to rational. It is called the life of God; a life from which we are naturally alienated; but to which all the subjects of divine grace are restored by the Saviour, who came, not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly. It will be completed in heaven; but it is begun here. The case is this. Man, by transgression, is dead in *state;* for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. He is also dead in *disposition*—or, as the Apostle expresses it, dead in trespasses and sins. But

the Christian is passed from death unto life—He is no longer exposed to condemnation; for he is justified by faith, and has peace with God. And he is no longer under the power of moral death; for he is quickened, and made to walk in newness of life. "I compare," says he, "my present with my former experience. I was once dead to divine things; for they no more impressed me than sensible things affect a dead corpse. But now, for the very same reason, I hope I am alive; for these very things *do* affect me; *do* interest me: *do* excite in me hope and fear. I am susceptible of spiritual joy and sorrow. I live, for I breathe the breath of prayer. I feel the pulse of sacred passions; I love, and I hate. I have appetite; for I hunger and thirst after righteousness. I walk, and I work; and though all my efforts betray weakness, they evince life."

But what will this life be, when there shall be no more death—when the body shall partake of the immortality of the soul—when both shall be glorified together—in a perpetual duration of knowledge, purity, friendship, riches, and glory—This is life eternal!

Now the Gospel is called the word of this life; and it has four relations to it. A relation of *discovery*—for it reveals the reality and excellency of this life; the way in which it is obtained; the source from which it flows; and every particle of information we have concerning it. A relation of *conveyance*—for it communicates and produces this life. A relation of *support*—for it is the means not only of begetting this life, but of maintaining and increasing it. Therefore it is considered as its food; adapted to all stages of its being; milk if we are babes; strong meat if we are men. A relation of *order*—it is the rule by which this life is governed as to doctrine, worship, experience, exertion. To this rule all our religion must be brought: and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

SEPTEMBER 2.

"*Holding forth the word of life.*"—Phil. ii. 16.

The Apostles did this supernaturally. They received their commission immediately from God; and were preserved from all mistakes in delivering his counsel; and could work miracles in confirmation and in defence of it. Ministers do this officially. They pretend to no original communications from God, no new discoveries; they derive what they publish from the Scriptures; and they call upon you to prove whether these things are so. Yet their preaching is a divine ordinance—a work which an angel might covet; the simple design of which is to hold forth the word of life.

But there are many ways of doing this, common to all Christians. And *they* are the persons the Apostle here addresses. They may hold it forth by their *profession*. This is not to be considered as a substitute for experience, but as flowing from it. Experience is a secret thing between God and their own souls: but their religion is to be visible as well as real. They that are in darkness are to show themselves: and we are to confess with the mouth as well as to believe with the heart, unto salvation. They may hold it forth by *example*. This must evince the sincerity, and conduce to the efficacy of your profession. You are required to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called; and to constrain others, by your good works which they behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation. Nothing is so eloquent as the silence of a holy, consistent, and lovely life. Actions speak louder than words; and by these you can cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, or adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. It is thus *all* can be "holders forth," whatever be their condition, and without leaving their place and station. This is the way in which servants are to preach to their masters and mistresses, and children to their parents—Indeed, with regard to all of us,

> "*Thus* shall we best proclaim aloud
> The honours of our Saviour God;
> When the salvation reigns within,
> And grace subdues the power of sin."

This is not however to hinder express *exertions*. By these, when the life is in accordance with them, much may be often done. There are few so situated and limited, as not to have some opportunities and influences by which they may be useful, and in a much greater degree than they are aware of, if they will seize them with simplicity, and diligence, and prayer. The talents of men are various; but the servant who has only one talent will be condemned if he wraps it up in a napkin. When we cannot do much individually, we can do something by joining with others, and recommending and aiding those institutions which aim at the diffusion of the cause of Christ. We cannot translate the Scriptures into other tongues; but we can circulate them. We are not at liberty to go abroad ourselves; but we can be fellow-helpers to the truth, by contributing to missions. Silver and gold we have none; but we can apply to those who have. We are not donors; but we can be collectors.

What should induce us to hold forth the word of life? Interest. The regard we pay to the Gospel will bless ourselves; for, like its Author, it says, Them that honour me I will honour. We seldom labour in vain in this work; but if our efforts should prove successless, in some way or other they will return into our own bosom. The most respected and the most happy Christians are the unselfish, the active, the fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

Benevolence. The Gospel is not only wonderful but all-important. It is the Gospel of our salvation. It is the bread, the water of life. For dying souls it is the only remedy. It has done more already for even the public welfare of nations than all the civil institutions of men: and by this alone will the wilderness and solitary place be made glad, and the desert rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Piety. It is thus God's perfections are displayed. It is thus his enemies are to be diminished, and his subjects increased. It is thus his kingdom comes.—And what claims has he not upon us for our service? Whose are we! Who bought us with a price?

Our relation in the Church. Why have we joined ourselves to a religious society, and placed ourselves under the ministry of the word! Is it only to commune together in privilege? Is it not also to co-operate together in usefulness?

SEPTEMBER 3.

"*Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.*"
1 Samuel iii. 9.

This shows a temper of mind which we should feel on every occasion. But what does He say to us now we are leaving home for a season; and shall in a peculiar sense be for awhile strangers and pilgrims on earth?

He requires us in this excursion to look to our motives. Surely sin is out of the question. What a dreadful thing would it be to go from home to get opportunities to commit iniquity, without danger of observation and discovery! To such it might well be said, This journey shall not be for thine honour. But the object is lawful if it be business; if it be friendship; if it be relative affection; if it be health; if it be recreation within proper bounds, and with a view to prepare for future application.

He requires us to move in a dependence on his providence. The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. In his hand our breath is; and his are all our ways. There are many who live without God in the world. James describes the presumption of such an individual in the thought of a journey, and a project—"Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." Paul speaks of a prosperous journey, by the will of God. Nothing can be done without his permission and blessing. He can set every thing against us; or make every thing conduce to our profit. He can spread a gloom over the fairest scenes of nature; or he can comfort us on every side. The elements are his. He preserveth man and beast. Let us remember our entire reliance upon him; and hear him at this moment saying, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

He requires that, wherever we go, we should maintain the consistency of our character. This does not forbid the exercise of prudence. We are even commanded to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves; and to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; and especially to walk in wisdom towards them that are without. But this does not require the surrender of principle, nor even the concealment of it. We are not to be ashamed of the Saviour, and of his words; but confess him before men. If we become all things to all men, it must be in things sinless and indifferent. If we please our neighbour, it must be for his good to edification. If we yield, and "trim our way," and act unbecoming our profession, we shall not only lose the benefit of reproving, convincing, and impressing others, by a practical testimony, but procure for ourselves contempt, instead of esteem. For those who understand not our experience, can comprehend our duty; and those who do not admire piety, despise inconsistency.

He therefore requires us to seize and to seek opportunities of usefulness. All cannot act in the the same way. Our stations and abilities differ: and we are not to suffer our good to be evil spoken of. But let us beware of indecision and excuse. "He that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap." Who may not be a blessing in every place in which he is found? Who can tell the influence, immediate or remote, of a proper and lovely example? of a word fitly spoken? of a book lent, or a tract given! of a *wise* and *moral* distribution of alms?—"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Let us never think any of our possessions or endowments our own. They are talents; and, "as every man hath received the gift, even so let us minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Many of our opportunities are already gone; and they are gone for ever. How many remain we know not, but they are few and uncertain. Let us awake, and resemble him who went about doing good; and who said, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

He requires that we should not be careless and inattentive observers of his works. The works of the Lord are great in number and in

quality; and are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. And I will, says God, that thou magnify his works which men behold. We can see them every where; but, as we move from one place to another, we perceive them in greater variety. And when, from an inland situation, we reach the watery world, we behold his wonders in the deep. The sea is his; and he made it; and, with all its immensity, holds it in the hollow of his hand. What wisdom do we recognise in the saliveness of the fluid; and in the ebbing and flowing of the tide! What power appears in raising, and in calming the billows; and in giving to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; saying, Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed!—And we should observe his works not only as objects of curiosity and wonder, but as excitements to admiration and praise. We should regard them not as naturalists and philosophers, but with the views and feelings of Christians.

He requires that we should find in all we see confirmations of our faith in his word. The Scripture tells us of the Flood by which the ungodly world was destroyed, and the earth convulsed and torn—And what indications of this awful catastrophe do we often meet with! The Scripture tells us, that though God made man upright, he sought out many inventions: and that we are gone astray; there is none righteous, no not one—And where can we go and not discern this? "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." And in the succession of the seasons we see this pledge redeemed. He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works—and we have but to open our eyes, and we see him opening his hand, and satisfying the desires of every living thing.

He requires that, in our progress and our return, we should be thankful. And how much is there to awaken our gratitude! That we have not only been supplied and supported, but have had so many agreeable prospects, and entertainments, and changes—that we have been preserved in our going out, and our coming in—that we have been secured from wicked and unreasonable men—that no accident has spilt our life upon the ground, or bruised a limb of our body—that our property has been secured, as well as our persons and health—that no plague has come nigh our dwelling—and that we know also that our tabernacle is in peace! Bless the Lord, O our souls; and all that is within us, bless his holy name!

He requires that we should realize life itself as only a journey, and think of getting home. We are but strangers and sojourners here, as were all our fathers. There is none abiding. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

SEPTEMBER 4.

"*Peace I leave with you.*"—John xiv. 27

We know whose words these are—And who was ever so qualified and authorized to speak of peace as he? He is called the Prince of Peace. His ministers are the messengers of peace. His word is the Gospel of peace. His way is the path of peace. An angel announced peace at his birth; and he himself bequeathed peace at his death—"Peace I leave with you."

For we may consider the words, so to speak, as a part of his last will and testament. Lands, and houses, and goods, and silver, and gold, he had none to leave. But such as he had he disposed of in the form and manner following. That is to say; his soul to God—Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit. His body, to the envy and malice of his enemies—to be buffeted, and scourged, and crucified. His wearing-apparel, to the soldiers—who divided his garments among them, and for his vesture cast lots. His widowed mother, to the care of John—who, from that hour, took her unto his own home. But what had his disciples all this time? Has he forgotten them? No—"Peace I leave with you."

But why does he bestow it upon them in a way of legacy? First; to make it the dearer. They would thus prize this boon—It was the remembrance of their dying Lord and Saviour. Any thing left us by a dying friend, if it be only a book, or a ring, is esteemed and valued. Secondly; to render it the surer. If it be but a man's testament, yet if it be confirmed, no man can disannul it. But here every thing concurs to establish confidence. The will is written, witnessed, and sealed. And the testator dies: for a testament is of no force while the testator liveth. And the executor is true and honest, and will see all punctually fulfilled—this is the Holy Ghost, which is to glorify him, by taking of his, and showing it unto them.

This bestowment was much more than they deserved. They had always been dull scholars; and sadly repaid the labours he had expended upon them. They had been very defective servants; and only a few hours before had been disputing among themselves which of them should be the greatest. And now, as his suffering drew near, instead of showing themselves his sympathizing friends, they were all going to forsake him, and flee—yet, loving his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

"Happy disciples, to be thus remembered, honoured, and enriched!" you are ready to exclaim—"how we envy you!" But these words were not to be confined to them. They were personally to enjoy the privilege; and they were immediately addressed. But, in receiving this assurance, they stood as the representative of all his people, to the end of time. And you, even you, if you love and follow him, are as much included in the bequeathment, as if you were mentioned by name. Witness his following intercession—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."

SEPTEMBER 5.

"*I will strengthen them in the Lord.*" Zech. x. 12.

This is the very assurance our hearts want, as we think of ourselves, and survey the duties and trials of the Christian life. And we cannot too confidently rely on the accomplishment of it; for it comes from the lips of Faithfulness and Truth. But we may err, as to the manner in which it is to be fulfilled; and therefore our expectation is to be regulated and qualified accordingly.

Let me observe, then, that the fulfilment of the promise, as long as we are here, will not exempt us from all ground of complaint. It will keep us in our work; but not cause us to cease from our labour. It secures us assistance in our conflict; but the war lasts for life. However strong our faith, and firm our hope, and long-suffering unto all joyfulness our patience; we shall still be sensible, and the more sensible too, of resistance, deficiency, defilement; and still acknowledge that, when we would do good, evil is present with us, and groan, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This impartation of strength will also be seasonable, and proportioned to the exigences of our condition—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." What we are to look to for is, not grace for imaginary purposes, but for real; not grace for future difficulties, but present; or, as the Apostle has it, grace to "help in time of need." It does not, therefore, follow, that what is formidable in the prospect, may be so in the event. You may fear death while living, and rejoice in it at last. "Is this," said Dr. Goodwin, "Is *this* dying? Is this the enemy that dismayed me so long—now appearing so harmless—and even pleasant?"

These supplies of strength are to be sought after and expected in God's own way; that is, in the use of the means which he has ordained. So his word deals with our hope "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, and waiting at the posts of my doors." "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

And have I not found it so? In the day when I cried, has he not answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul? Have I not kneeled down with a contracted, and risen up with an enlarged heart? When I have read his word, hath he not thereby quickened me? Have I not found him, in his palaces, for a refuge? Has he not sent me help from the sanctuary, and strengthened me out of Zion?

How foolish, then, to avoid religious exercises, when I am not in a proper, and spiritual, and lively frame! *The means of grace* are surely, then, the most necessary: as fire is the most needful when we are cold; and excitement when we are most dull.

It is only a part of the truth, that we are to pray *with* the Spirit—we are also to pray *for* it. Witness the language of the Saviour—"If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Witness the example of the Church—"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

SEPTEMBER 6.

"*He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.*"—Deut. xxxii. 10.

And will not this apply, O Christian! to thee, as well as to Israel?

Will not the *finding?* "He found them in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness." And where did he find you? What was your natural state? What was the world lying in wickedness? What was the earth, as filled, from the effects of sin, with vanity and vexation of spirit? There, not you found Him, but He found you—To his name give glory, for the mercy and the truth's sake. You did indeed find him: but how? "I am found of them that sought me not; I am sought of them that asked not for me." You

did choose him: but as the cause or consequence of his choice? "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Who can refuse to acknowledge, We love him, because he first loved us!

—Will not the *leading?* "He led them about." There was no road, and much depended upon their movements. He therefore became their conductor. And we know how he did this. It was by a fiery cloudy pillar. As this advanced, they removed. As this turned to the right or the left, they turned also. As this paused, they remained. Thus they were freed from all anxiety. The distance they had to go was not great in itself. Jacob's sons, with their asses, soon passed and repassed between Egypt and Canaan. And the Israelites quickly reached Kadesh-barnea, which was not far from Jordan; but they were turned back. And if you consult a map, and observe their winding marches, you will see the propriety of the expression, He led them about. And has he not thus led you? You knew that the way of man is not in himself. You cried unto the Lord, and said, Lead me in thy truth, and guide me, for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day. And he said, I will lead thee and guide thee, and instruct thee with mine eye. And has he ever abandoned you? What mistakes has he prevented! How often has he hedged up your path, to keep you from going astray! From how many embarrassments, the effect of your acting without him, has he extricated you! He has always led you in the right way; but it has often been a trying one; and such as you could not have foreseen or conjectured. In your temporal affairs he has perhaps checked you, and turned you back: you have had life to begin again: and to seek other openings and labours. And as to your spiritual experience, instead of gaining more of the assurance of hope, doubts and fears have invaded you; and instead of victory over your enemies, you have been led to see and feel more of the evil of your hearts; while you have often asked, If I am his, why am I thus? Yet all this has fulfilled the promise, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

—Will not the *teaching?* "He instructed them." They had the finest opportunities in the world to learn, cut off as they were from intercourse with the surrounding nations, and being alone, with God as their preceptor. When at Horeb, they sat down at his feet, and received of his words. He gave them laws and ordinances. He sent them Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam. He taught them much by events, pleasing and painful. He showed them in example the evil of sin, the happiness of obedience. Yea, he gave them his good spirit, says Nehemiah, to instruct them. And has he not instructed you? If you have been unprofitable learners, the fault has been your own. You have had every thing favourable in your situation. A thousand resources of information have opened around you. You have the Scriptures, the preaching of the Word, Christian intercourse, and the unction from the Holy One, which is to teach you all things. Every thing that has befallen you has read you lessons. Some things you *must* have learned—that this is not your rest—the folly of trusting in your own hearts—the greatness of your unworthiness—and that it is of the Lord's mercies that you are not consumed.

—Will not the *protection?* "He kept them as the apple of his eye"—the tenderest part of the tenderest member. Did the serpents bite them? He provided a remedy, and healed them. Did enemies assail them? It was not with impunity. He reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. Amalek; Sihon, king of the Amorites; and Og, king of Bashan; found, to their peril, that he made their cause his own. Did Balaam use divination and enchantment? He owned there was no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel. He cursed them, but the curse was turned into a blessing. In travelling, were they exposed to the sun? The Lord was their shade on their right hand. He preserved them in their going out and in their coming in—they were a people saved of the Lord. And who has kindly, tenderly, constantly, kept you? Have you had no enemies? Why have you not been a prey to their teeth? Why has not your heart turned back? Why have not your steps declined from his ways? *He* has holden you up. You have been kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.

This is what he has done for you
—What have you done for him?
—What are you doing?
—What do you resolve to do?

SEPTEMBER 7.

"*The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*"—Hosea i. 1.

We are not informed whether he had been trained up for the holy office, or been called in a manner sudden and unlooked for. Some of the prophets were taken at once from following their common occupations; as we see

in the instances of Elisha and Amos. Others were taken, and this was more generally the case, from the schools of the prophets; where, by retirement, and prayer, and meditation, and instruction, they were gradually prepared to minister in holy things. Thus God both sanctified the use of means, and showed that he was not confined to them. It is the same now. Some of the most pious, eminent, and useful ministers the Churches ever possessed, have been educated for the purpose; and we ought to be thankful for such institutions; and on these, for our spiritual supplies, we must *principally* depend—But we must not limit the Holy One of Israel. He will sometimes take a man out of our rules, and give him acceptance and success. And we must receive a Bunyan, as well as an Owen. When will persons allow God to work in his own way? and learn that, because one thing is right, another need not be wrong? But Hosea was *divinely commissioned*—"The word of the Lord came unto him." "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And they could *demand* attention, in the name of him, who sent them—"Thus saith the Lord."

—His *descent* is also remarked—He was "the son of Beeri." The Jews have a rule, that the prophet whose father is named, was the son of a prophet. But this does not always hold. Nothing is recorded of Beeri. Yet it is reasonably concluded, that unless he had been a man of some distinction, and from whom Hosea derived honour, he would not have been mentioned. And this he might have been, without possessing worldly rank and riches. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. He is happily and nobly descended, who springs from those who are great in the sight of the Lord—He may well exult, and say—

> "My boast is not that I deduce my birth
> From loins enthron'd, and rulers of the earth;
> But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
> The sons of parents pass'd into the skies!"

Let us live, as that our children may derive from us advantage and respect.

But the principal thing is, the *time* of his ministrations—"In the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah; and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." Now if he prophesied only from the end of Jeroboam's reign, the son of *Joash*, to the beginning of Hezekiah's, it would have been near seventy years. But he prophesied *in* the reign of both. And if we allow him a few years in each of these, and reckon up the length of the reigns between, his ministry must have been little short of eighty years; and it was probably even more. And five things may be observed from hence.

First. How very little we have of his prophesyings. Fourteen short chapters, read in much less time than a modern sermon, include all that has been perpetuated of far the longest ministry on record. Some labour for posterity; and leave behind them works which will render them a blessing to future ages. Others are called more to serve their own generation, by the will of God; and are preachers rather than writers. How useful was Whitfield as a preacher! while his few writings have had little circulation, and rather serve to excite wonder that he was so powerful in another capacity. How useful has Hervey been as a writer! while his preaching was without excitement, and scarcely distinguished by any effect. Some, like Doddridge, have excelled, both in the pulpit and from the press. Every servant of God has his peculiar gifts, and his appropriate sphere—"Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

Secondly. He must have begun his ministry very young. Paul forbids the ordination of a novice, lest he should be lifted up with pride. Talent is not all that is necessary for the sacred office. How necessary is the knowledge that is derived from experience! and the confidence that grows out of the trial of character! Thirty was the age for entering on the Levitical service. And not earlier than this period did John and Jesus commence their public ministry. But "the word of God is not bound." Timothy was young; so young, that Paul was obliged to say, "Let no man despise thy youth." Samuel was employed, while yet a child. Jeremiah was consecrated from the womb. And this was nearly the case with Hosea. What a privilege, what an honour, to be early dedicated to the service of God! "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth."

Thirdly. He must have been very old before he retired from labour. Some do not resign early enough, but stand about as a hinderance in the way of usefulness. The excellent Cornelius Winter often prayed to be preserved from this error. Indeed, few can set well, and say of a successor with proper feelings, "I must decrease, but he must increase." Others resign too soon. They would retire upon a pension, before they are disabled in the holy war. A minister may want the sprightliness and vigour of youth and yet have the ripeness and richness of age; and the fruit may drop without much hard shaking. Some nobly fall at their post—sword in hand—faithful unto death—and, with the crown of life, obtain the commendation, "Thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted."

Fourthly. He must have passed through a vast variety of condition. He lived in the reign of one good king, and of four bad ones. He saw peace, and much war. He saw plenty, and more than once, scarceness and famine.

He saw a few partial revivals of religion; but witnessed general and constant wickedness. How many of his relations, friends, and pious connexions, had fallen! How lonely must he have felt! How changed his views! How convinced must he have been, that all below is vanity and vexation of spirit!—while, yet, God was the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. How much he knew of what was doing in other countries, we cannot determine. But within the compass of his ministry lived Lycurgus, the famous Lacedæmonian legislator; and Hesiod, the Greek poet; and Rome also was now begun.

Finally. A man of God may labour long, and do very little good. The people he addressed not only continued wicked, but waxed worse and worse: and the captivity he had threatened, he lived to see commenced. He certainly saw a part of Israel carried away captive, by Tiglath-Pileser; and probably the entire destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes, by Salmanezer. This must have been very painful. But it did not slacken his efforts. We are not answerable for our success. If we lose our labour, we shall not lose our reward. A greater than all said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

SEPTEMBER 8.

"*Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?*"—Romans ii. 4.

One of the ways in which God addresses us, in his Word, is expostulation. To expostulate is to accuse before an open rupture. It is the lingering of friendship, offended indeed, but unwilling to abandon its object without further trial. It is anger blended with kindness: it is chiding, accompanied with entreaty. —This is a very pleasing view of the Supreme Being, and induces us to exclaim, Lord, what is man, that *thou* are mindful of him; or the son of man, that *thou* visitest him! By the transgression of his law we reduced ourselves to ruin. He remembered us in our low estate; and provided for our deliverance. The blessing is placed before us, and within our reach. But we disregard it; and contemn the Saviour, as well as the Ruler. Thus we deserve that his wrath should come upon us. Yet, before he pronounces sentence, he sends for us into his presence; and reasons with us; that, being unable to defend our conduct, we may acknowledge, by our silence, that we have acted a part that leaves us without excuse, and without hope—"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?"

The Apostle speaks of "the riches of his goodness." These riches appear in numberless displays.—But he adds—"and forbearance and longsuffering;" to induce us to consider the latter, as the proof of the former.

To see, then, the riches of his goodness, let us contemplate his forbearance and longsuffering. Every thing in God enhances his patience.—His *greatness* enhances it. We are more affected with an affront from an equal than from a superior; and more from an inferior than from an equal. How does the master resent an offence from his slave? or a king from a subject! All comparison fails between God and us. He is the maker of all things; and all nations before him are as nothing. This is the Being insulted. And who is the offender? A groveling worm upon a dunghill. And yet he bears with us.—His *wisdom* enhances it. We cannot be affected with affronts of which we are ignorant. How would some be enraged if they knew only what is *said* of them by some of their "dear five hundred friends;" how they turn them into ridicule before they have well left their house; and what freedoms they take with their character, and their conduct, in almost every company! None of our offences are secret from God. He hears all; sees all; and knows perfectly every imagination of the thoughts of our heart. And yet he bears with us.—His *holiness* enhances it. If we do not think and feel a thing to be an affront, there is no virtue; for there is no difficulty in enduring it. The trial is when it touches us to the quick in some most valued interest. Sin is exceeding sinful. By nothing does God deem himself so dishonoured. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. It is the abominable thing which his soul hates. And yet he bears with us.—His *power* enhances it. Why do we put up with a thousand wrongs? We know them, and feel them; but we reluctantly submit, because we have no way to punish them. Why are not sinners destroyed? Moses, when he had provoked the Egyptians, saved himself by flight. But whither can we go from God's presence, or flee from his spirit! Some, when they have provoked resentment, have defied it, and successfully too. But who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered? His look is death. And yet he bears with us.—His *bounty* enhances it. We complain peculiarly of an injury or an insult, from one who is much indebted to us. From another, we say, we could have borne it; but he is viler than the brute: for the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. We are under infinite obligations to the God we provoke. In him we have lived, and moved, and had our being. His table has fed us; his wardrobe has clothed us; his sun has warmed us. And this is not all. His kindness continues, notwithstanding all our ingratitude. And he not only spares us, but in every way indulges us. He waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon us.

Yet are these riches of his goodness "despised."—Despised by *inconsideration*. We treat them as unworthy of our notice. They do not occupy our thoughts, or our speech.—Despised by *disobedience*. We resist their design, which is, to lead us to repentance. God calls, but we will not answer. He knocks, but we refuse to open—Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?—Despised by *perversion*. We turn them into instruments of rebellion; and make them the very means of increasing our impenitency. If we thought God would strike us into hell the next sin we committed, it would not be committed: but since he is too kind to do this, we are induced to offend him. We are evil, because he is good.

How *unreasonable* is this! How *vile* is this contempt! How *shameful!* If an individual was to behave towards a fellow-creature as men are continually acting towards the blessed God, no one could notice him but with astonishment and contempt. Yet we talk of the dignity of human nature! or contend that it is but slightly injured by the Fall!

—And how *dangerous!* How *ruinous* is this contempt! It is true, God is merciful and gracious. But he will by no means spare the guilty. Nothing equals the penalty of the Gospel—it is the savour of *death unto death.*

SEPTEMBER 9.

"*They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest.*"—Isaiah ix. 3.

THREE circumstances are here mentioned. They *joy*. They joy *before Thee*. They joy before Thee *according to the joy in harvest*. Each of these will supply an interesting and useful meditation.

THEY JOY.

Among the many mistakes entertained concerning religion, no one is more common than the notion that it prescribes a forced, gloomy, melancholy course; engaged in which, we must bid adieu to every thing like pleasure. And nothing can be more injurious than this notion: for men will naturally turn from religion while they view it as the enemy of their happiness. But nothing is so unfounded and false as this opinion. Let us take it to three tribunals.

Let us bring it to the bar of *reason*. It must be allowed that God is able to make us happy or miserable. And if so—Is it likely that he will suffer those who hate and oppose him to be happy? and those who love and try to please him to be miserable? What a notion of the Supreme Being would this imply! And what could equally blaspheme his character?—And has a hope, that my sins are pardoned; that God is my Father; that Providence is my guide; that Death is my friend; and that heaven is my portion; a tendency to inspire me with sadness, or with joy? And which is most adapted to make me wretched or comfortable within? Malice, or benevolence? Passion, or meekness? Pride, or humility? Envy, or complacency? Anxiety, or confidence?—Distant things do not sufficiently impress us. We need something immediate. Our propensity to present gratification is powerful. And must not religion meet this state of feeling, and provide for it? Thirsty as man is, if there be no pure stream at hand, will he not kneel down to the filthy puddle? What is to preserve us from being drawn away by the allurements and dissipations of the world, but our having something better to satisfy our hearts at home, and to keep us from roving?—What can sustain us in our trials, and animate us in our duties, if destitute of present consolation? The joy of the Lord is our strength. We shall soon decline a course in which we feel no interest or delight. And if we are strangers to holy pleasure, how can we impress others in favour of religion? It is by singing at their work that his servants praise their master; and prove that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

Let us take it to the bar of *Scripture*.—Read the Bible all through for this purpose. Take its commands. What are these? "Rejoice in the Lord, and be glad, ye righteous; and shout aloud for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." "Rejoice evermore." "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice." Take its promises. What are these? "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted." "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs." "They shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before them into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Take its representations, What are these? Go back to the beginning of the Gospel. The first Churches walked not only in the fear of the Lord, but "in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Peter, addressing Christians at large, says, "In whom, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." If *we* libel Christianity, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, they honoured it. What hindered their joy? Losses did not—"They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." Persecutions did not—"They received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." Guilt did not—They joyed in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they received the atonement. Death did not—They longed to depart, to be with Christ, which was far better. Eternity did

not—They were looking for that blessed hope, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God. Joy was then considered as an essential part of genuine religion. The circumcision not only worshipped God in the spirit, and had no confidence in the flesh; but also rejoiced in Christ Jesus. And the Apostle would as soon have excluded from it righteous conduct, and a peaceable temper, as spiritual joy: for, says he, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Let us bring it to the bar of *experience*. Experience signifies knowledge derived from experiment, in opposition to theory and hypothesis. And experimental philosophy has been, of late years, much extolled. And why should not experimental religion be equally recommended? Is there no standard in spiritual things, to which we can appeal? And is there no way of subjecting the truth and importance of their claims to trial? Many are, indeed, too careless, and too prejudiced, to pursue the process. But some have examined, and reduced the subjects to decision. And they, and they only, are the persons to whom you should repair in a case of this kind. They have this advantage over you. You have never tried their principles: but they have tried yours. You have never walked in their ways: but they have walked in yours; and know, as well as you, that they are not pleasantness and peace. And, after trying your resources, and finding them to be vanity and vexation of spirit, they have tried the Saviour's promises, and have found them to be full of grace and truth. At first, they could not be swayed by faith; but now they have something more: they have the Witness in themselves. They know, for they have applied to him, that he is a suitable, a willing, a mighty Saviour. They know they were strangers to peace, till they were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son—but they have come to the blood of sprinkling. They know that once they were ignorantly asking, Who will show us any good?—but they have found the fountain of life; and can say, it is good for me to draw nigh to God. *They*, therefore, ought to be heard. They can speak with confidence and earnestness; for they speak from experience—And this is their language: "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Let us listen no longer to a report, as false as it is evil. It is a good land which the Lord our God giveth us. Let no man's heart fail him.

SEPTEMBER 10.

"They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest."—Isaiah ix. 3.

THEY joy—BEFORE THEE. This shows The *sincerity* of this joy. All men are in view of God; and they are always before him: but the wicked and the worldly never *joy* before *him*. *Their* joy is all show and profession: it may deceive their fellow-creatures; but it cannot impose on God. He sees through all the hypocrisy of *their* happiness: he knows, that in the midst of their sufficiency, they are in straits; and that they sigh and groan, though others do not hear them, over all their successes and indulgences. Their joy is for company, not retirement. They cannot partake of it, till they forget God. One thought of him damps all their pleasure—Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. And hence, they dislike conscience, God's deputy and secretary. They cannot relish their enjoyments till they have sent him out of the way; or lulled him to sleep; or stupified him with an opiate: or silenced him with a bribe: one look, one word from conscience, will be enough to spoil all their delights. They never taste one drop of real joy. There is no peace, saith God, to the wicked.

But the Christian's joy will bear the gaze of God. It lives and flourishes in his presence. And so far is he from shrinking back from the eye of his heavenly Father, that the thought of being near him, with him, before him, affords him relief and satisfaction. He can say, with Asaph, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me up by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

This reminds us of the *secrecy* of this joy. It is before *him;* and often he alone discerns it. Strangers intermeddle not with it. The world knows it not. Seeing Christians often poor, and afflicted, and despised, they are at a loss to conceive how *they* can be joyful. They are therefore men wondered at. Their fellow-creatures can see their burdens; these are often plain enough: but they see not their supports; they see not how, underneath them, are the everlasting arms; or they would not wonder that they do not sink. They see their losses and trials; but their communion with God, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, are invisible. Neither are the subjects of this joy disposed to divulge it to all. They are, indeed, ready to say to them that fear God, Come, and I will tell *you* what

he hath done for my soul: but, were they to communicate their feelings to others, they would not be understood by them. It would be worse than speaking of the pleasure of literature to a clown; or of the pleasure of melody and harmony to a man who has no ear for music. The joy also does not operate and discover itself like common mirth. It is not the froth that swims and shows on the surface. It lies deep. It is not noise, but composure. It is the calm of the mind: the content of the heart: the sunshine of the soul: a peace that passeth all understanding. A man, if joyful, does not joy like a child. "True joy is a serious thing."

But God sees his people, even when sorrowful, yet always rejoicing either in possession, hope, or desire. He sees them turning aside from the world, to refresh and exhilarate their spirits alone with himself: and hears them (when no other ear hears them) saying, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

> "Be earth with all her scenes withdrawn;
> Let noise and vanity be gone:
> In secret silence of the mind,
> My heaven, and there my God, I find."

They joy before Him. This also reminds us of the *medium* of this joy; not indeed exclusively, but pre-eminently so—It is connected with the *worship and ordinances of God.* And the allusion is to the three annual solemnities of the Jews when they went to appear *before the Lord* in Zion. For there he was considered as residing. There was his house, his table, his attendants. This, said he, is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it. Hence, says David, when shall I come, and appear before God?—These services were called feasts. There were songs to be sung in the way to them. The people went with the voice of joy and gladness to keep holy day. And when they arrived, they were required "to rejoice before him." Is God less present in our assemblies, than in those of the Jews? Has he not said, "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee?" And many can set to their seal that God is true. They know he is there, waiting to be gracious, and exalted to have mercy. They have found him there, and conversed with him, as a man talketh with his friend. They have seen his power, and his glory, in the sanctuary, and have there tasted that the Lord is gracious. Hence they hail the Sabbath, as the day of holy convocation, with delight. They are glad when the summons comes to go into the house of the Lord. They come before his presence with thanksgivings: and show themselves glad in him with psalms.

Yes, they who mourn; and are there comforted—They who come burdened with guilt; and are there set free—They who come in the midst of trouble, and find him in his palaces for a refuge—They who come cold and languid, and are quickened according to his word: these verify the promise, "I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer." And they know the meaning of the declaration—"They joy BEFORE THEE."

SEPTEMBER 11.

"*They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest.*"—Isaiah ix. 3.

THEY joy before Him—ACCORDING TO THE JOY OF HARVEST. And what is this joy?

It is a joy connected with *exertion.*—Reaping is no easy thing. But this is not all that is required. There is manuring, and ploughing, and sowing, and harrowing, and weeding. All these are previously necessary to the joy of harvest. The husbandman does not eat the bread of idleness. His labour fills his hands. Every season has demands upon him: and the end of one work is the beginning of another. Indeed, nothing valuable is to be obtained without diligence and difficulty: yea, it would not be valuable, or prized, if it were acquired priceless and painless. And are not we to exercise ourselves unto godliness? And is it nothing to worship God in spirit and in truth? And to watch in all things? And to pray without ceasing? And to keep the heart with all diligence? "But the grace of God does all this *for* us." It does. But it is equally true, that it does all this *by* us too. God does not believe and repent; but enables us to believe and repent. *We* run the race that is set before us, we fight the good fight of faith—though in him is all our help found.

This joy requires *patience.* The husbandman soweth in hope; but the accomplishment of his hope is future. Weeks and months, and many dreary weeks and months, intervene, before his wishes can be fulfilled. Yet he is not foolish enough to suppose, that he has laboured in vain, because he cannot reap as soon as he has sown; or childishly eager enough to cut down the grain green, to hasten the harvest. But what does he? "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." And so Abraham, after he had patiently endured, received the promise. Christians also, are required to wait. And let them remember, that in due time they shall reap, if they faint not. And they have not long to wait. Their salvation is nearer than when they believed. Yet a few more rising and

descending suns; and it shall be said, "Put ye in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe."—In the mean time the process is hourly advancing to maturity; and the end shall prove, that every thing is most beautiful and most profitable in its season. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

This joy is not free from *anxieties*. When the seed is first thrown into the ground, it seems lost; and when it revives from a kind of death, and springs up, it has to encounter the frosts of winter, the changings and blights of spring, the lengthened dryness or wetness of summer. And when the period is arrived for securing the precious treasure, solicitude is more alive and alert. The husbandman often rises, and looks at the sky. Ten times in the day he examines the glass. He goes about with a heavy heart, and a depressed countenance; and often forebodes the worst: and it is not till he has safely housed the whole, that he can give up himself to satisfaction and delight. But how will this apply to Christians? Is there any thing precarious in the purpose and promise of God? No. But it is otherwise with their apprehensions. Their eternal prospects awaken all their concern; and they have a thousand doubts and fears concerning their safety and success. Am I an heir? Is this repentance towards God? Is this faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? Can these wandering thoughts and imperfect desires be prayer? What if, after all, I should fail of the grace of God, and come short of the glory to be revealed!

But this joy is *great*. When the harvest is come, every face betrays pleasure. The very toil seems delight. They that pass by say, "We bless you in the name of the Lord." "He that soweth, and he that reapeth, now rejoice together." Pennant tells us, in his Travels, that in parts of Scotland he sometimes saw large numbers reaping, to the sound of a musician behind them, playing on the bagpipe; and thus enlivening the scene, and softening the work. And David says, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," or, as it is in the margin, reap singing. And he adds, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." And who has not heard the shoutings of the rustics, as the last loaded wain returned from the field, covered with green boughs! And who has not witnessed the rude mirth of harvest-home! But if "the poor labourers sing;" think of the owner! Now his anxieties are dispelled! Now his patience is rewarded! Now his exertion and expense are abundantly repaid—his garner is full, affording all manner of store; and he hails, in his possession, the means of indulgence, improvement, and wealth! Yet, what is this joy, compared with the Christian's! The one is for the body; the other for the soul. One is for time; the other is for eternity. One is common to the wicked and the righteous; the other is peculiar to the subjects of divine grace. The one may gender intemperance, and sin; the other sanctifies, while it contents.

Let me learn, then, to improve the works of creation to pious purposes; and make nature a handmaid to grace.

And let me be thankful for the harvest with which we have so recently been favoured. He has again "prepared of his goodness for the poor." All, indeed, are concerned. "The king is served by the labour of the field." But kings have many ways of living, that poor people have not. We do not think of palaces or mansions, so much as of the dwellings of the poor, when we view the waving fields. He has not only given us plenty, but afforded us the appointed weeks of harvest. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

Yet man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Let me therefore labour, not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. All spiritual blessings in heavenly places are provided and represented. Yet the season for securing them is limited, short, and uncertain. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. And how many, in consequence of neglect, have exclaimed, at a dying hour—THE HARVEST IS PAST; THE SUMMER IS ENDED—AND WE ARE NOT SAVED.

SEPTEMBER 12.

"*Yea, he loved the people.*"—Deut. xxxiii. 3.

THERE can be no doubt of the truth of this assertion with regard to Israel. They were often reminded of it: and they were as often told *why* he set his love upon them. The reason was not their greatness; for they were the fewest of all people: not their goodness; for they were a stiffnecked people: but because the Lord had a favour towards them. Hence he chose them, and redeemed them, and provided for them, and distinguished them by miracles and privileges. "To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." "He dealt not so with any land."

But has he less appeared to thee, O Christian! saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with lovingkindness have I drawn thee! Here is the source of your salvation. However wide, and however far it flows, here the river rises; and take

what stream of it you please, it will lead you up to this spring-head, the free and undeserved favour of God—"Yea, he loved the people."

But his love to his people, so to speak, is of three kinds.

A love of *benevolence*. This consists in wishing and designing them good.

A love of *beneficence*. This consists in doing them good. It appears in a thousand instances. The principal one of all is, his remembering them in their low estate, and sending his only begotten Son into the world, that they might live through him. *Herein*, therefore, says the Apostle John, is *love;* not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It was necessary to find a way in which his goodness could reach us, consistently with his nature as a holy being, his claims as a lawgiver, and his honour as a governor. And this medium of our salvation does not therefore detract from the author of it: for if he required a sacrifice, he furnished one, and it was the *Lamb of God*. And therefore the Apostle says, being justified *freely* by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

A love of *complacency*. The love of benevolence, and the love of beneficence, regarded them as unworthy and as miserable: but the love of complacency regards them as new creatures. He cannot take pleasure in them while they are destitute of his image, and enemies to him by wicked works. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? But he prepares them for his delighting in them, and holding intercourse with them. He saves them by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Then he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. Does a man take pleasure in his inheritance? In the wife of his bosom? In the children of his affection? In the work of his hands? They are all this, and more than all, to the God of all grace. He puts their tears into his bottle—Are they not in his book? Their prayer is his delight. Their alms are the odour of a sweet smell. He corresponds with them. Visits them. Takes up his abode with them. He rejoices over them with joy. He rests in his love. He joys over them with singing.

What can I wish for more? Suppose men reproach! Since I have been precious in thy sight I have been honourable; and thou hast loved me. Let them curse; but bless thou. One smile of thine is better than life; and will more than balance a universe of frowns.

Let my portion, and the portion of mine, be —"The good will of him that dwelt in the bush."

SEPTEMBER 13.

"*And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*"—Gen. xv. 8.

—Why, had not God that very moment promised it? And was not his word sufficient?

They surely have never made the trial, who imagine that it is an easy thing to believe. To confide in a being invisible, and whom we have so deeply offended, and to hang our everlasting hope upon his naked truth, requires the exertion of the power that raised up Christ from the dead. Who never feels in him the working of an evil heart of unbelief? Our Lord upbraided his own Apostles with their want of faith. And even the father of the faithful desires something more than God's engagement to give him the land of Canaan—Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

Yet God pardoned his servant in this thing; and stooped to his weakness; and yielded him what he required. And Abraham was satisfied with the sign and the seal.

There is a better country, even a heavenly. The possession of it is an object worthy of all our concern. And they who love it and seek it supremely cannot leave their claim undecided and uncertain: and therefore their language will be, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation"—"Give me a token for good"—"Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

"Why you have the promise of God, who cannot lie!" Yes: and this infallibly insures it, to all those to whom it belongs—But who are the *heirs* of promise! Away with dreams, and visions, and sounds in the air, and impulses, and accidental occurrences of passages of Scripture. We have surer evidence. We have unerring proofs, furnished by God himself. Search his word with diligence and prayer. *There* you will find, not the names indeed of the heirs of eternal life; but their characters—their qualities—their taste—their choice—their way—their aim.

Let me fix on one of these vouchers only —It is a preparation for the blessedness. Where this is found, the title can never be absent. The Apostle therefore gives "thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." In another place he says, "He hath wrought us for the selfsame thing." And he does nothing in vain. If he has, by the agency of his Holy Spirit, fitted you in the temper of your soul for the world of glory, you may be assured that he designs you for it. If you bear the image of the heavenly, you will partake of their condition. If you have the dawn of that blessed state, you will have the day. Grace is of the same nature with glory: they differ only in the degree. Is heaven not only the high but the holy

place into which entereth nothing that defileth? And do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?—Does the blessedness consist in adoring the Lamb that was slain; and in being like him; and in seeing him as he is? And are you now glorying only in his Cross; and following him in the regeneration; and praying that you may know him in the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings?—Will the distinctions in life, now allowable and necessary, be done away; and only those remain which arise from character? And are you valuing persons, not according to their outward circumstances, but their real, their moral, their spiritual worth?—As no inquiry will be made there, *where* we have worshipped; but *how:* nor to what denomination we pertained; but whether we were Jews inwardly—can you now pray from the heart, "Grace be with *all* them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity?" Can you now say, "*Whosoever* shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother?" Then heaven is already begun; and therefore insured: for we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath *begun* a good work in you will *perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* If you can take the representations of the employments and enjoyments of heaven given us in the Scripture; and can *desire* these things; and *hope* for these things; and find your *liberty* and *happiness* in them; you have the earnest of the inheritance, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. Let me not then, O my soul! be faithless, but believing; and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

SEPTEMBER 14.

"*Lean not unto thine own understanding.*"
Prov. iii. 5.

The understanding is a natural faculty, by which man is distinguished from inanimate creatures, and also from the animal world. The sun, and moon, and sea, and rivers, are impressed by laws, of which they know nothing; and follow their destiny, wholly unconscious of the operations they perform. The beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, have an instinct which often surprises us. But, while it is exact as far as it goes, it is exceedingly limited: it admits of no variety or progression. These beings are no wiser now than when they went to Noah for shelter, and to Adam for names—But there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. By means of this endowment he can look backward and forward. He can examine and judge. He can survey principles in their abstraction; and duties in their circumstances; and actions in their moral bearings. He can refuse the evil, and choose the good, against present feelings and imposing appearances.

This faculty, from the lowest degree of reason to the highest reach of intellect, is the gift of God, the Father of lights; and should be cultivated by us as men and as Christians. We should rejoice that we live in a country and in an age so favourable to all kinds of information. It is a sad reproach to many, that in the midst of knowledge they are found so ignorant as they are; it must be the result of dissipation or sloth.

But though we are to prize, and improve, and make use of our understanding, we are not to *lean* to it. Yet, if we were not prone to this, the caution would be needless. There is nothing of which men are so proud as their knowledge. There are more than a few who would rather be charged with a want of principle than a want of cleverness; and would rather pass for knaves than fools. This regard seems, indeed, to be a kind of equalizer of the human race: and the only thing with which all are satisfied, and in which they feel an ineffable complacency, is their *own* understanding. They lean to their *own* understanding, in preference to the understanding of others; whom yet, if asked, they would consider as very superior to themselves, both in capacity and experience. They may, indeed, consult with an adviser; but it is in hope of finding a confirmation of their own opinion: and should his judgment differ from their conclusion, they would feel little difficulty in resolving by which to abide. We frequently see this in those who are just entering the world, and so much need a guide, to escape those early mistakes that may affect the whole of their future life. Whatever quickness of perception they may possess, they must surely be destitute of that practical wisdom that grows out of observation and trial. Yet how little do "the younger submit themselves to the elder!"

—Men carry this disposition even into the things of God. They regard their own reason more than his word; and are reluctant to believe what they cannot comprehend. We are told that Alphonsus, the royal astronomer, having apprehended some seeming irregularities among the heavenly bodies, was daring enough to say, "Had I been by the Creator, when he made the world, I could have given him some good advice." We justly shudder at his profaneness: and yet who has not fallen into a similar error? Who has not found fault with God in his manner of governing the world, the Church, the family, the individual? Who has not been ready to direct the Spirit of the Lord; and, being his counsellor, to teach him?

To preserve us from this tendency, Let us remember how limited our own understanding is; how many subjects there are entirely

beyond its reach; and that there is nothing with which it is perfectly acquainted. Let us also reflect how much we are impressed by appearances; and how different these often are from the realities of things. "Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life; all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?" What should we have been at this hour if things had always accorded with our mind and wishes! Let us look back, and see how frequently we have erred, both in our hopes and fears. We now clearly see, that what we so eagerly desired would have proved our injury or ruin; and that what we were so anxious to escape has conduced to our best welfare: so that we can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

We are very incompetent to judge for ourselves, because we know not the influence other and untried events will exert upon us. To these we go forward with our present views and feelings; not aware that new scenes will produce new views and feelings; and may unfold secrets in our character of which we have no conceptions, and which may fill us not only with surprise, but dismay. Thus, when Elisha predicted, with tears, the atrocities and cruelties he would commit, Hazael shuddered at the thought, and sincerely exclaimed, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" the man of God only answered, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." And his elevation transformed him from the man into the monster which he had execrated!

And if, by leaning to our own understanding, we take one wrong step, what consequences, immediate or remote, personal or relative, may arise from it! See this in David. I shall now perish, said he, one day, by the hand of Saul: "there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." The oracle, had he consulted it, would not have told him so. In truth it was the worst measure he could have devised. It tended to alienate the affections of his countrymen; to justify the reproaches of his enemies; to deprive himself of the means of grace; to put himself out of the Divine protection; and to lay him under obligations to a benefactor he could not oblige, without betraying the cause of God. Accordingly he was soon drawn into a scandalous equivocation with Achish. Then he was ordered to go and fight against his own people Israel. And when he was released from this embarrassment, and went back, he found that, in his absence, his residence and property had been destroyed, and his family carried away captives. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Lot leaned to his own understanding; and chose the vale of Sodom, which was well watered, like the garden of the Lord. By this movement he separated himself from intercourse with his pious uncle. He was taken captive by the confederate kings. He was strangely induced to reside in the town itself; and dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds. At length he was burnt out of house and home. His wife, for looking back, became a pillar of salt: so that he never after could go or gaze that way. His daughters contaminated by the vices of the place—But we dare not go on. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart—Lean not to thy own understanding—In all thy ways acknowledge HIM, and HE shall direct thy paths.

SEPTEMBER 15.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"
Acts ix. 6.

THIS is a very marvellous question, considering from whom it came. For the inquirer, till now, had hated the name of Jesus; and was at this very time actually engaged in the persecution of his followers. What would he have thought, if some one could have told him previously, that in a few hours, in a few moments, he would be a worshipper at the feet of the Nazarene! But so it was: and he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

Let us never despair. The chief of sinners are within his reach. He has a mighty arm; strong is his hand, and high is his right hand. What changes has his grace already accomplished: and what changes must it accomplish still, if the promise be fulfilled, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." But let us make this inquiry our own. It is every way worthy of our adoption.

It is personal in its aim—Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do? Many seem more anxious to reprove others, than to know their own faults; and are busily employed in pulling the mote out of their brother's eye, while a beam is in their own. Some are always reading and hearing for others. And we have known persons applying, in a sermon, to some fellow-worshipper, things which every one else in the assembly would have deemed most proper for their own use. We should think of ourselves in divine things; and bring home every truth to our own business and bosoms, whether it encourages or censures. We should pray, Search *me*, O God, and know my heart; try *me*, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. When our

Lord had informed Peter of his duty and destiny, Peter saw John coming towards him, and asked, Lord, and what shall *this* man do? But our Saviour said, What is that to thee? follow thou me.

It is practical in its subject—What wilt thou have me to *do?*—Not to know, to hear, to believe, to talk of. Religion, indeed, extends to every thing: but every thing is not essential to it. But practice is. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. Faith, without works, is dead, being alone. Though a man say he hath faith and hath not works, can faith save him? Every part of the truth, as it is in Jesus, has a bearing upon the heart and the life of the receiver; and is according to godliness.

It is impartial in its desire—Lord, *what* wilt thou have me to do? I do not prescribe. I do not select. I do not prefer—Thy pleasure alone I ask to know, and am resolved to follow—Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. True obedience is compatible with defects; but not with partialities. If a man regards some things and nôt others in religion; those he regards he regards from some other motive than the will of God: for *this* would lead him to regard the one as well as the other; seeing they are all enjoined by the very same authority. He that offends in one point is guilty of all; not in the act, but in the principle: he violates the authority of the whole. For he that said, Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, said also, Enter into thy closet. If therefore you engage in public worship, and never retire for devotion, you are an offender. He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill: now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. We never can truly obey, therefore, unless we can say, with David, I esteem all thy commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

SEPTEMBER 16.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"
Acts ix. 6.

Before we yield ourselves to any one, we should have full confidence in him; and the confidence should be founded on knowledge. To no fellow-creature can we wholly resign ourselves, either of right or with safety; for as he has no title to us, so we know not what his depravity may require of us. We owe duties to our fellow-creatures; and to many of them we may say, What wilt *thou* have me to do? Yet we must obey *them* only "in the Lord." But his authority is supreme. He has infinite claims to my implicit homage.

Five principles demand and more than justify the absolute surrender of myself to him, saying, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

First. The righteousness and excellency of his requirements. Each of his prohibitions only says, Do thyself no harm. Each of his injunctions is an order to be wise, and rich, and noble, and happy. While following him my understanding never blushes; my conscience never reproaches me. I can give a reason for my obedience as well as my hope. His will is always a reasonable service—His work is honourable and glorious.

Secondly. The relations in which he stands to his people. He is their husband—He is their father—He is their master—He is their sovereign—He is their maker—from whom they have derived all they have and are. And surely in each of these it becomes them to ask, "Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?"

Thirdly. His greatness. This is unsearchable. He is Lord of all. All the angels of God worship him. All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things; and by him all things consist. His greatness is necessary to the illustration of his goodness; and crowns it with glory and honour. What condescension is there where there is no dignity! But he was in the form of God, and took upon him the form of a servant—There was the stoop! He was rich; and for our sakes became poor—There was the grace! Greatness alone produces not attachment, but dread and aversion. But while *he* has all power in heaven and in earth, he is full of grace and truth.

Therefore, Fourthly, the obligations he has laid us under by his kindness. What are the obligations any of our fellow-creatures have laid us under? What have they done for us? What have they suffered for us? How few, how inconsiderable, how unexpensive, how unattended with any thing like sacrifice and self-denial, have their acts of favour been! But he, without our desert, and against the greatest demerit, remembered us in our low estate; and, in his love and pity, redeemed us. And how? He was made a curse for us. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. By his stripes we are healed. Where does he stand? how does he appear? when he says, My son, give me thy heart?—

> "See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
> Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
> Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
> Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

And can we wonder at the result?

> "Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
> That were a present far too small:
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all."

No legal process ever produced this surrender. The display of terror and mere authority never made one cordial convert to any cause. Would you be induced to love another by his commanding you to do so: or by his threatening you if you did not! No; but by a display of love. Love begets love. And

we love him, because he first loved us. At the Cross we are effectually wooed and won. *There* we are drawn, and there we are bound with cords of a man and the bands of love.

Lastly. His engagement to reward our devotedness to him. Christians are not mercenary; but they cannot serve him for nought. The recompence must be of grace, and not of works: and so much the better is it for the largeness of their hope, for it is to be measured and judged of, not according to their doings, but his own abundant mercy, which is to be displayed therein. Hence will he say at last, with regard to those poor performances over which they have blushed and wept, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." But he is not unrighteous to forget their work of faith and labour of love, even now. *In* keeping his commandments, there is great reward. Great peace have they that love his law; and nothing shall offend them. He is the best of masters. He furnishes them with ability for their work. He lays no more upon his servants than he enables them to bear. He will comfort them in affliction. He will not cast them off in old age. He will remember the kindness of their youth. When heart and flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. And at death, receive them to himself; that where he is there they may be also.

Sinners talk of the pleasures of sin; but they never commend them at last. The people of the world boast of its amusements and delights; but they never speak well of the world at parting. In every season, in every condition, however trying, the Christian can say—Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord.

"Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

SEPTEMBER 17.

"*Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.*"—Matt. xvii. 27.

In the midst of this supernatural scene, a sanction is thus given by our Saviour to the use of means. The supply was, in its source, preparation, and announcement, miraculous; yet Peter, who is to receive it as a favour, is to procure it by his instrumentality. The peculiar nature of the instance only renders it the more conclusive: for if our Lord would not dispense with the use of means in an extraordinary case, surely he will not dispense with it in an ordinary one. Some good, but not very wise people, seem to think that instrumentality detracts from the Divine glory; and that God is honoured more by acting *im*-mediately. But instrumentality supposes and requires agency: and the means themselves are always the Lord's own; and he gives them their success. His producing an effect by various concurrences and co-operations displays more of his perfections, and gives more opportunity to observe them, than his causing a result by an instant volition.

Here was something which Peter could do, and something which he could not do. He could not replenish the fish with the money, or make it to swim in the direction of his bait: but he could procure the bait, and throw in the hook; and in the most likely place; and stand; and watch. Why does not the Lord dispense with all this? Why does he not cause the fish to spring on shore? and appear at once upon Peter's table? Because he would not sanction indolence. Because he would render even his miracles moral, as well as marvellous. Because his exertions were not a mere parade of power; but a display of wisdom and goodness, meeting indigence, relieving weakness, confirming faith: but not encouraging folly and presumption; teaching us to trust, but forbidding us to tempt him.

In like manner, there is always something which we cannot do; and something which we can do. But the evil is, that we commonly derive from the former, excuses for our neglect of the latter: and so God's agency becomes a reason for our inactivity, instead of exciting our diligence. But this is perfectly contrary to the meaning of the Apostle, when he says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; *for* it is God which worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." In natural things we are wiser. Can the husbandman produce an ear of corn? He knows it is perfectly impossible. But he can manure, and plough, and sow; and in the use of these he expects the Divine efficiency—but *never* in the *neglect* of them. No man can quicken his own soul. Yet there are means which are designed and adapted to save us; and we can pray, "Come, thou north wind, and blow, thou south." It is thus that religion possesses the evidence of analogy; and in the God of grace, we see the God of nature. He feeds the fowls of the air, not by putting it into their mouths; but by furnishing provision; and giving them wings, and eyes, and feet, and beaks, to find and make it their own. "That thou givest them, they gather"—And *thus* "he satisfies the desire

of every living thing." He could warm us without the fire, and sustain us without food; but we know what would be the consequence were we to disregard these, under a notion of honouring him by a dependence on *his agency*.

Though the effect here was beyond the means, yet there was an *adaptation* in them. Peter was a fisherman; and he is employed in his own line: and his fishing was not only the condition of the result, but the medium, and *conduced* to it. And, in general, we may observe, that while the insufficiency of the means serves to display the power of God, the suitableness of them shows his wisdom. And such a suitableness there is. A pen cannot write without a hand to use it; yet there is an adaptation in the instrument to the work. Some seem to use the means of grace only as *tests* of their submission to the Divine appointment—not as things which have a real tendency even in themselves to do them good. They expect the Divine blessing *in* them, but not *by* them—that is, not as an effect resulting *from* them under the Divine influence—as if in the use of them they were planting and watering pebbles, which, by an Almighty exertion, *could* be made to yield produce—instead of using them as a man sows wheat, and looks for wheat to arise from it. Faith cometh *by* hearing; and hearing tends to produce it, by informing and convincing the mind. The same may be said of a religious education, in forming the moral and pious character of the child.

Peter did well not to disobey, or reason; but to follow implicitly the Divine order; fully expecting success. And he was not, and could not be disappointed. And thus let us act without murmuring, or disputing. Let us use the means which he has prescribed, not only swayed by his authority, but relying on his promise, that none of those that wait for him shall be ashamed.

SEPTEMBER 18.

"*I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.*"—Zech. ix. 11.

Persons may be prisoners, as felons, as robbers, as debtors, as captives taken in war. The character of the subjects of Divine grace, by nature, involved all these.

A pit wherein there is no water is a situation expressive of destitution, wretchedness, and danger. There the victim has nothing to relieve his wants; nothing to quench his raging thirst. He cannot live in it. He cannot escape from it. He is ready to perish. Such was Joseph's pit, and Jeremiah's dungeon. In such a condition the Lord finds his people.

But he does not leave them there. He always produces a change in their favour. If they are in darkness, he calls them into his marvellous light. If they are far off, he brings them nigh. If they are prisoners in a pit wherein there is no water, he sends them out of it. In his love and pity he redeems them, and makes them free indeed.

The work is entirely his own; and the principle cannot be mistaken. How unworthy were they of his notice! How great the evil from which they have been rescued! How infinite the blessedness resulting from it. And after such a deliverence as this, shall they again break his commandments? A soul redeemed, demands a life of praise. Let my people go, that they may serve me. What has he sent them out of their bondage to do? but to go and tell sinners, such as they themselves once were, that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plenteous redemption? but to show forth his praise? but to acknowledge, that by the grace of God they are what they are? but to walk in newness of life? to run in the way of his commandments? to return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their head?

And can this be a task? Did Zacharias think so when he sung and prayed—"That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear; in holiness, and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives!" His service is perfect freedom.

SEPTEMBER 19.

"*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.*"—Hosea vi. 3.

Whether we consider these words as an excitation and an encouragement addressed by the godly to each other, or to their own souls; they remind us of an important aim; a necessary duty; and an assured privilege.

The *aim* is, "to know the Lord." For the soul to be without knowledge it is not good. All the operations of the Spirit are begun and carried on in the renewing of the mind. Nothing can be moral or religious in our dispositions and actions, that is not founded in knowledge, because it must be destitute of principle and motive; and the Lord looketh at the heart. Real repentance must arise from proper views of the evil of sin, in connexion with the Cross of Christ—"They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him." Even faith is impossible, without knowledge—"For how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" "This," says the Saviour, "is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." This declaration not only decides the importance of this knowledge, but also the nature of it—It is not a philosophical knowledge of God, as an almighty being, the maker and upholder of all things; or even a know-

ledge of him as holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. Such views of him, alone, must, on the mind of a sinner, gender dread and aversion. The grand thing in the restoration of a fallen and guilty creature, is to know that He is reconcilable; that He is willing, even now, to become our friend; and has already given undeniable proof that He is willing to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon him. And all this is only to be seen in the Only Begotten of the Father, who has declared him. God in nature, is God above me; God in providence, is God beyond me; God in law, is God against me: but God in Christ, is God for me, and with me. Neither is this knowledge of him a merely speculative acquaintance with him; such as men may possess, who behold, and wonder, and perish. There is a great difference between the decisions of the judgment, and the bias of the will; between the convictions of the conscience, and the submission and acquiescence of the heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "I will give them a heart to know me." "He hath shined in our heart, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

Connected with this, there is a necessary *duty*. It is "to follow on" to know the Lord.

This takes in the practice of what we already know. To what purpose would it be for God to afford the light they have not, to those who neglect the light they have? It would only increase their sin and their condemnation. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." And we see this constantly exemplified. When men love not to retain God in their knowledge, it is their interest to see things less clearly; and so they part with one truth after another, as it becomes troublesome: till God gives them up to strong delusion to believe a lie. While those who do his will, know of the doctrine; advancing towards the light, they get more into its shining; and as far as they have already attained, walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing, if in any thing else they be otherwise minded, God reveals even this unto them.

It also includes diligence in the use of appointed means: such as reading the Scriptures; and hearing the word preached; and meditation; and "walking with wise men;" and, above all, prayer to the Father of lights, according to the promise, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

It must also mean perseverance in this course. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Here is not only watching, but waiting. Some run well; and are hindered. But we are to run with patience the race that is set before us; and, by patient continuance in well doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality."

Nor shall this be *in vain*. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." The privilege is as *sure* as the word of God, confirmed by his faithfulness, and all history, and all experience, can make it. And if probability will actuate a man to engage in an enterprise, and continue in a series of exertions and sacrifices; how much more should actual certainty! Let therefore this full assurance of hope excite and influence us in two cases.

The first is with regard to ourselves. The way of the Lord is strength to the upright. Keep his way; and your path shall be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Your perplexities shall be solved. Your doubts removed. Your fears subdued. Crooked things shall be made straight; and rough places plain. You shall know more of him in his word, providence, and grace; and more of him as the strength of *your* heart, and your portion for ever.

The second regards others. Be not impatient if they cannot embrace all your religious views at once; and are amazed at some parts of your experience. In grace, as well as in nature, there must be infancy before manhood. Though now their acquaintance with divine things be small, and they only see men as trees walking, the Enlightener will put his hand a second time to the work, and they shall see every thing plainly. If their heart be broken off from sin and the world; and they are asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, they shall not err therein. "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

SEPTEMBER 20.

"*In him is no sin.*"—1 John iii. 5.

No sin original. David said, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. The same may be said by every individual of the human race. Our Saviour was truly a man; but to secure him in the participation of our nature, from pollution, behold a new thing in the earth! He is made only of a woman: a virgin conceives and bears a son; and that holy thing which is born of her, is called the Son of God. His people are holy by renovation: he was so by nature. Even when sanctified, they feel within them a conflict: the flesh and the Spirit oppose each other, and they cannot do

the things that they would. But he had no warfare of this kind. He could not say, I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. All his senses, and appetites, and passions, moved in obedience to reason, and in unison with the will of God.

Hence there was in him no sin actual. In proof of this, the testimony of his friends may be deemed partial—though they had the best opportunities of knowing him; and they all gloried in the avowal, that he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. But hear the multitude—He hath done all things well. Hear the dying thief—This man hath done nothing amiss. Hear Pilate, who judicially examined him—I find no fault in this man: I am pure from the blood of that just man. Hear Judas, the domestic spy, after three years of intimacy with him—I have betrayed innocent blood. No one ever had more keen or malicious observers, especially in the Pharisees, whom he had exasperated to fury, by laying open their pious wickedness to the people. But he challenged every adversary —Which of you convinceth me of sin? If there be any thing in us susceptible of evil influence, Satan will be sure to find it; for he has a bait to suit every disposition—but the Prince of this world came and had nothing in him. He struck the sparks, but there was no tinder. Events, whether prosperous or painful, are severe trials. If there be mud at the bottom, the waves will cast up mire and dirt—But he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. He was made under the law; and this law is so spiritual, that the holiest of men, when they have compared themselves with it, have always prayed, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified—But even this law had nothing to complain of in him; it found, in principle and in practice, all the obedience it required. And how was he viewed by him, who is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things? He always did the things that pleased the Father.

The fact, therefore, is undeniable. But whence this exception? How came this one man alone to have no sin in him, while, as to the myriads of the human race beside, they are all gone out of the way; there is none righteous, no, not one! It can only be accounted for upon the admission that he was the Lord from heaven; the Holy One of God; the Word made flesh; the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; who received not the Spirit by measure; in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

This is not an unimportant decision. The innocency of his character affects the credibility of his mission and his doctrine. A being in whom was no sin, could not have been a deceiver: but he constantly declared that he came forth from God; that he came to seek and to save that which was lost; that he would cast out none that came to him.

It serves to evince the *nature* of his suffering and death. He had no sin of his own, and therefore if he died not for the sins of others, he died without any reference to sin at all. And where is the God of judgment? That be far from him, to slay the righteous with the wicked. No one ever suffered under his government absolutely innocent; but either as personally or relatively guilty: bearing his own desert, or the desert of others. But in him was no sin: yet he was esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. And so he was—"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed."

Without this, he could not have been qualified for his work. He had *immediately to* approach Infinite Purity. His sacrifice would not have been accepted, unless he had offered himself without spot to God. Such an High Priest became us, who was harmless, holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and who needed not to suffer for his own sins, dying only for those of others.

What a character is here! Others are lovely; but he is altogether lovely. See what humanity can become—and will become, in all his followers. For they are predestinated to be conformed to him. The spirits of just men will be made perfect; and though they will be re-embodied, their bodies will have no seed of corruption in them; for they also will be not derived, but produced. They could not have full communion with him, without complete likeness to him—But this we know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, *for we shall see him as he is.* "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

SEPTEMBER 21.

"*My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.*"—Exod. xxxiii. 14.

This exceeding great and precious promise belongs to the Christian, as well as to Moses. What is he authorized to expect from it?

My presence shall go with thee *to guide thee*, and I will give thee rest *from perplexity.* How miserable would a man be in travelling, if his journey were important, and yet he was ignorant of the way, and every moment liable to err! In this case nothing could relieve him so much as a guide who was willing to go with him, and able to show him the course he should always take. And his satisfaction would be in proportion to the confidence he reposed in the disposition and capacity of his leader. Nothing can equal the importance of the journey we are taking; life or death, salvation or perdition, depends upon the issue: and "the way of man is not

in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." If left to himself, he will err at every step, and in the greatness of his folly for ever go astray. The Christian feels this, and therefore prays, "Lead me in thy truth, and guide me; for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day." And does God disregard his cry? "I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit; which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." This extends to doctrine; to experience; to all his temporal concerns. He is not indeed to look for miracles: but he is under the conduct of God; and he has given no promise but shall be fulfilled. When the Jews were marching to Canaan, they had a pathless desert to go through: but they were free from all perplexity, because they had a fiery cloudy pillar, to regulate all their movements. We have the same. For "this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

My presence shall go with thee *to guard thee*, and I will give thee rest *from apprehension*. A Christian has not only a pilgrimage, but a warfare to accomplish. No sooner has he set his face Zion-ward, than he has reason to exclaim, "Many there be which rise up against me; and many there be that say of my soul, there is no help for him in God." And what wonder if, while without are fightings, within are fears? And how is he to prevail over them? He knows, that if left to himself, he must perish, long before he reaches that better country. But he is not alone. There is One at his right hand, who says, "Abide with me; for he that seeketh thy life, seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." At the sound of this, his mind is relieved, his confidence rises, and he sings, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

My presence shall go with thee *to provide for thee*, and I will give thee rest *from anxiety*. The manna was not to be hoarded, but gathered daily; and we are to feel our constant dependence upon God for the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And is this trying? Could we wish it to be otherwise?

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." "My grace is sufficient for thee." What more can we desire? When we have trusted in God for the soul, it might be imagined that it would be easy to trust in him for the body. But temporal things are sensible, and near, and pressing: and some cases would be enough to awaken all their forebodings: but he has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing. Jehovah-jireh! The Lord will provide.

My presence shall go with thee *to comfort thee*, and I will give thee rest *from sorrow*. However you may be stripped, you shall not be destitute of consolation. Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, nor fruit be in the vine; you shall rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of your salvation. His presence is a substitute for any creature; it can more than repair every loss. Some leave us from rottenness of principle; some from infirmity rather than depravity. Death abridges our circles. Who can look back over a few years, and not exclaim, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine aquaintance into darkness?" Yet if the lamps be extinguished, the sun continues. If the streams fail, we have the fountain. Are the consolations of God small with thee? In the multitude of thy thoughts within thee, do not his comforts delight thy soul?

But Oh! when I shall gather up my feet into the bed, and turn my face to the wall—then, all creatures withdrawn—and flesh and heart failing—oh! what can support me in the prospect, and, above all, in the experience of that event? Be of good courage. He who is with thee in the wilderness, will be with thee at the swellings of Jordan, and open a way through the flood, and give thee a dry-shod passage over, into the land flowing with milk and honey. He who has been with thee in life, will be still more with thee in death. And therefore you may boldly say, with one before you, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

From this hour, let me never forget this blessed promise—"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Let me believe it with a faith unfeigned. Let me ascertain my title to it. Let me plead it before the Throne of Grace. Let me apply it in my perplexities, my apprehensions, my anxieties, my sorrows. Let me bind it about my neck, and write it upon the table of my heart—that when I go, it may lead me; when I sleep, it may keep me; and when I awake, it may talk with me. Amen.

SEPTEMBER 22.

"*Thy Maker is thine husband.*"—Isaiah liv. 5.

The relation in which God stands to us must be all-important. If we are his people, he is related to us not only as the God of nature and providence, but as the God of grace. This spiritual connexion is held forth under various forms; none of which is more common, simple, or well-known, than the marriage union.

The marriage union is honourable in all. It is exemplified in the larger part of the human race. It was established in Paradise, where it was not good for man to be alone: and in commendation of it our Saviour wrought his first miracle at a wedding. But, applied to God and us, it is a metaphor; and therefore it is to be soberly explained. For while we are not to overlook the wisdom and kindness of the Holy Ghost in meeting our weakness, we are not to press every circumstance of the comparison into an article of allusion. The relation into which God enters with his people is analogous to that which subsists between the husband and the wife. This could be easily explained and understood.

But let us take the reality of the connexion itself to show us three things. First. The condescension and goodness of God. Nothing will bear a comparison with it. Consider what *He is*; his independence, his greatness, his glory. And view *them* in their unworthiness, lowness, vileness. How wonderful that *He* should thus magnify *them;* and set his heart upon them! They had neither birth, nor relations, nor wealth, nor wisdom, to recommend them. It cannot, indeed, be denied that they are distinguished by all these attributes now: but this is the consequence of the relation, and not the cause of it—"*Since* thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee."

Secondly. The privilege of believers. Blessed are the people who are in such a case; yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord. They have One, in the nearest of all relations to them, who is love itself; and will bear with their infirmities, and in all their afflictions be afflicted; who is infinitely wise, and knows their frame, and will never mistake their welfare; who is almighty, and able to defend them from every danger, and to make all things work together for their good: who is faithfulness and truth, and will never leave them nor forsake them; who lives for ever, and renders the union eternal and indissolvable.

Thirdly. Their duty. They must mind their husband's concerns. They must regard properly his relations. They must obey him. The wife promises this in marriage; and the Apostle enjoins it: Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands. He extends it to every thing: but this must be qualified with one condition—every thing reasonable and righteous. Vashti refused Ahasuerus, when he sent for her to come and exhibit herself before a company of intoxicated lords and officers, in violation of all decency, and the laws of veiled concealment in which women then lived: and we justify her disobedience. But, with regard to us, the will of God is absolute, not only because he has a propriety in us which one creature can never have in another, but because all his commandments are right. The wife is required to reverence her husband. This must be a hard saying in some cases, seeing there are sometimes so very few materials to excite veneration in the *head* of the wife.—But this should have been thought of before: and persons should not voluntarily contract relations, the duties of which they cannot perform, and dare not neglect. God's excellences are infinite: and it is delightful to give him the glory that is due to his holy name. The wife, also, must be faithful to her husband: "she is for him, and not for another." And we are only the Lord's. There is such a thing as spiritual adultery: to avoid which we are to keep ourselves from idols. Milton's wife returned home again; but she came back and humbled herself, and was re-admitted to favour. Here is the duty of the Church—"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him."

SEPTEMBER 23.

"*I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice.*"—Phil. iv. 2—4.

The Apostle much valued and commended the Philippian converts. He here calls them—his "brethren;" his "dearly beloved;" and "longed for;" his "joy and crown." Many people *distress* and *disgrace* their ministers; but these yielded Paul both *comfort* and *honour*. He does not, however, deem them above the need of exhortation. Yet, though he might have been bold to enjoin what was convenient, for love's sake he beseeches and entreats. The subject is threefold.

First. Unanimity and concord. This regards a particular instance of disagreement in the Church. "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Here were two women, obviously of some note, who were at variance. We are not informed whether the ground of difference was civil or religious. Perhaps it was owing to a talebearer; for a talebearer separateth true friends. Perhaps it was a mere trifle in the outset. In our mistakes, prejudices, passions, and infirmities, the enemy of souls always finds materials for exciting dislike and contention. Perhaps they were both to blame. This is commonly the

case; and therefore the Scripture says, forgiving *one another*. The feelings of females are quick; and their imaginations too often give importance to a real or supposed offence. And two such individuals at variance may draw in others, form parties, and embroil a whole Church. When this is the case, their own edification is at an end; and from others is driven that union of soul which is necessary to give efficacy to social prayer, when we meet together in one place, with one accord, waiting for the promise of the Father. The Apostle, therefore, would not that Euodias and Syntyche should oppose, or keep shy of each other; but, composing their difference, keep the peace, and live in love. The Saviour is the Lamb of God; and if we have the mind that was in him, we shall display "the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ." The Holy Ghost descended upon the Head, and enters his followers, as a dove: and

> "The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
> Flies from the realms of noise and strife:
> Why should we vex and grieve his love,
> Who seals our souls to heav'nly life?"

—We read in ecclesiastical history of two Christians who had quarrelled in the morning; but in the evening one of them sent a note to the other—"Brother, the sun is going down." He referred to the Apostle's words, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath:" and the hint produced reconciliation. When President Edwards had preached one of his first sermons, after the remarkable outpouring of the Spirit upon his labours, he observed two families, when the congregation had withdrawn, remaining, as if by joint consent. Upon approaching them, he found they had, to that day, been in a state of variance; but owing to the influence they were now under, they could not depart from the house of God till they were reconciled.

Secondly. Mutual assistance. "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." Some have imagined that those women here alluded to were Euodias and Syntyche. If it were so, we should learn that persons who have been betrayed into improper temper and conduct, in a partial instance, may yet have been worthy and useful characters; and they are not to be rejected, but restored, in the spirit of meekness. But whoever these females were, they had co-operated with Paul and his associates in the ministry—not in public preaching; for this our Apostle had expressly forbidden; but in various offices suited to their sex and condition; by their devotion, and example, and conversation; by their privately instructing the ignorant; by their bringing up children; washing the saints' feet; attending benevolent institutions; ministering to the wants of the apostles. All who wish to be useful may be employed without violating any of the decorums of life, or quitting their proper stations.

On their behalf Paul addresses his "true yokefellow." It is absurd to suppose this means, as some have thought, Paul's wife. For it seems more than probable that he never was married: and the gender of the adjective here used is masculine. Was it the jailer?* He had been one of the Apostle's first converts at Philippi; and had much assisted him in the Gospel. Or was it Epaphroditus? But *he* was not at this time at Philippi. Perhaps it was some one of the bishops or deacons, mentioned in the beginning of the Epistle; with whom Paul had been peculiarly connected in travelling and preaching. Whoever he was, he was to help those females who had been so serviceable to Paul, and Clement, and their comrades: by his prayers, and consolations, and every kind of attention their personal or relative, temporal or spiritual, circumstances would require. How honourable was it to be thus distinguished and recommended by the Apostle! Who was ever a loser by any thing he did for the cause of the Redeemer? He that watereth shall be watered also. God is not unrighteous to forget the work of faith and labour of love. Wheresoever the Gospel is preached that which these women did shall be told for a memorial of them.

Thirdly. Constant joy—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Rejoicing is a pleasing exercise; but it is not always an easy one. In a vale of tears; in an enemy's country; without, fightings; within, fears; pressed down with a sense of unworthiness; burdened with infirmities; wearied with a body of sin and death: what wonder if we often hang our harp on the willows? or, at least, that we cannot always sing the Lord's song?—Yet we are enjoined to rejoice "always." But how? In what? In whom? In the world? In creatures? In ourselves? Then would it indeed be impracticable. No—But "in the Lord." And in him there is enough at all times, and in every condition, to encourage and delight us. We are empty; but in him all fulness dwells. In him is all the wisdom, pardon, righteousness, strength, and hope we need. His grace is sufficient for us—He is an INFINITE RESOURCE.

—Therefore, says the Apostle, I have not spoken thoughtlessly, I know what I have said, and why I have said it; I know that the thing is possible. And I know, also, that it is proper. Nothing becomes a Christian more than joy; and by nothing can he be more useful. I therefore repeat it—AND AGAIN I SAY REJOICE.

SEPTEMBER 24.

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."—1 John ii. 6.

The state here spoken of is *abiding in* Christ. A man's *saying* he is thus in him is done two ways. The one is to himself—and so it is belief. The other is to his fellow-creatures—and so it is profession. The rule of such a man's life is the example of Christ—*walking as he walked.* And to this he is under an obligation to conform—He *ought* to walk even as he walked. The obligation is fourfold.

First. He ought to walk, even as he walked, from a principle of *evidence.* Deception, in religious concerns, is not only possible, but common; and the consequences, if the delusion continues, will be dreadful. Hence we should be anxious to know whether our hope is any thing better than presumption; or our safety is any thing more than self-security. If from self-confidence we contemn such solicitude, let us remember that the sacred writers command us not to be high minded, but fear; and to examine and prove whether we be in the faith. There are, indeed, many proofs of a gracious state; and there are some of a more experimental nature, to which we do well to take heed: but none of them can afford us relief, if they are unaccompanied by an imitation of Christ. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

Secondly. He ought to walk even as he walked from a principle of *consistency.* The relations and conditions in which we are found determine the propriety of our conduct. When we know what a man is, we conclude what it becomes him to do. A steward is expected to be found faithful; and dishonesty draws upon him censure and condemnation from all. Every one is sensible that a priest and a king should not act like common men; but that a dignified and sacred line of conduct is required by their rank and office. Christians are kings and priests unto God; and therefore they must walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. The man who advances peculiar and superior claims to any thing has no reason, no right to complain, if he be judged by his pretensions. He who wishes to pass as a Christian avows himself related to Christ; and by his doctrine and character he must be tried: he ranks himself above all the world; and challenges the inquiry, What do ye more than others?

Thirdly. He ought to walk even as he walked, from a principle of *usefulness.* He will thus put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He will wipe off the reproach attached to the Gospel. He will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. He will be the means, by his good works which they behold, of inducing those that are without to enter the way everlasting. No one can imagine the influence and efficiency of a life entirely Christian. It is a blessing to the whole neighbourhood in which it is displayed. It is like a dew from the Lord, and as showers upon the grass. But by an unworthy and unbecoming conduct a professor of religion can destroy much good. He causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. He hardens transgressors. He perplexes the weak. He grieves the strong. He opposes and discourages all those who are labouring to win souls. Wo to the world, because of offences! And wo to that man by whom the offence cometh!

Fourthly. He ought to walk even as he walked, from a principle of *gratitude.* We feel and acknowledge the kindness shown us by our fellow-creatures? and in consequence of it we endeavour to meet their wishes, and to avoid whatever pains or displeases them: for actions speak louder than words. What has not Christ done for us? See his condescension, when, in the form of God, he took upon him the form of a servant. See his grace when he was rich, and for our sakes he became poor. See him in the manger, and in the garden. See him upon the cross dying; and upon the throne reigning for us. See him making all things work together for our good. And surely we shall feel that a peculiar, a supreme love to him becomes us. And how are we to show it? Shall we ever grieve his Holy Spirit? Shall we not ask, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Shall we not pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer?" He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. He that offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God—Upon which Philip Henry observes, Thanksgiving is well, but thanksliving is better.

If we walk like him now, we shall walk with him hereafter. It is his own promise—"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy."

SEPTEMBER 25.

"I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."—Psalm lv. 8.

Such was the language of David—And it may be the language of any other good man, in the depth of distress. But it is allowable and proper? There is no perfection here; and there is nothing concerning which we should indulge more tenderness of censure

than hasty expressions, uttered under the pressure of pain or grief. Perhaps it was to prevent our severity here that the cases of Job and Jeremiah are recorded, both of whom, though eminent in piety, cursed the day of their birth. The Scripture is not harsh upon them; and it is observable, that when James refers to one of these bitterly-complaining sufferers, he only says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." They who have never been in a state of peculiar distress, know little of the feelings of human nature under it. But there are others who can respond to the invitation of sympathy, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me!" And the Father of mercies knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. We are not required to choose suffering for its own sake; or to be indifferent to ease and deliverance. Our Saviour himself had not that fortitude which mocks at pain; but that which felt deeply; and yet submitted. With strong cryings and tears he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done."

But what allows of excuse truth does not require us to commend. It was his infirmity that induced David to long for death, to hasten his escape from the stormy wind and tempest: and an old writer tells us it would have been more honourable for him to have asked for the strength of an ox to bear his trials; than for the wings of a dove to flee from them. Is not such language unworthy and ungrateful! Should we overlook and forget all our comforts! *Have* not these been great and numerous? And did we *then* long to flee away! —Yea, *are* they not many and various even *now?* And shall we only dwell on the dark side? Let us examine again; and let truth and thankfulness stand by. And may they not *yet* be many and great! Afflictions are not immutable dispensations. What changes often take place to the surprise as well as joy of desponding sufferers!

> "The Lord can change the darkest skies;
> Can give us day for night:
> Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
> To rivers of delight."

And is there not unbelief in the case? You are afraid of all your sorrows; and not only of their continuance and increase; but of their influence and effects. You dread lest you should not bear them properly, so as to glorify God; but sink in the day of adversity. Yet, O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt? Is not he *able* to preserve, and support, and comfort thee! And has he not *engaged* to do it! Has he not said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee? "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." And has not his conduct always accorded with this assurance; both with regard to others and with regard to thyself!

> "Did ever trouble yet befall,
> And he refuse to hear thy call?
> And has he not his promise past,
> That thou shalt overcome at last?"

More than once you have been appalled in the prospect of a trial; but when the evil day came there came with it mercy and grace to help. Perhaps you even gloried in tribulation. Perhaps you would not refuse to pass through some of those distressing exercises again, to enjoy the same peace and comfort.

Is there not much ignorance and inconsideration in this impatience? How do you know that it is better to escape from these troubles than to bear them! Not one of them has befallen you by chance. May you not infer the righteousness of them all from their very author! Is not his work perfect! Are not his ways judgment! He doth all things well. Does he detain you in distress because he does not love you? Yea he loved you with an everlasting love; and withheld not his own Son from you. You may therefore entirely confide in him, assured that if he does not release you it is because he waits to be gracious; and also equally assured, that blessed are all they that wait for him, for it is good for a man, not only to hope, but quietly *wait* for the salvation of the Lord.

First. Your own welfare may require the process. The Saviour was made perfect through suffering; and the character of every Christian is more formed and improved from his afflictions than his enjoyments. What would some of you have lost, had you fled away before such a trying dispensation enriched your faith and hope! How much of your happiness in heaven will arise from a review of your present conflicts on earth! The very trial of your faith is precious: and the crown of life is promised, not to him that *escapes*, but to him that *endureth* temptation. Afflictions are heavenly agents, and work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Secondly. The welfare of others may require it also. We are detained here to be useful; and we are often most useful in our trials. Nothing strikes like facts. The passive graces are the most impressive. They are better than a thousand sermons; better to arrest the careless, to instruct the ignorant, to encourage the timid, to comfort the desponding. It was well Bunyan did not escape from the prison at Bedford, or we should not have had his Pilgrim's Progress, and his Holy War. Paul was a prisoner, and knew that to depart and be with Christ was far better; nevertheless, because it was more needful for the Philippians, he was willing to abide in the flesh, and acquiesced in the adjournment

of his deliverance and bliss. And here *you* also may be wanted. Perhaps you have a venerable mother, and are required to rock the cradle of her age who rocked the cradle of your infancy. Perhaps you are a parent, and a rising family is dependent on your care, instructed by your wisdom, edified by your example. We are all placed in circumstances where we may prove a blessing: and this is our only opportunity. We may glorify God in heaven; but not in the same way as now, by submission, patience, and self-denial. This is an advantage we have above the glorified. They cannot exercise candour, and forgive injuries, and relieve distress, and save souls. Life is ours as well as death. Therefore all the days of our appointed time let us wait, till our change comes.

SEPTEMBER 26.

"*And he brought him to Jesus.*"—John i. 42.

THESE are few words; but they are very instructive and improving. We may ask three questions.

To whom was he brought? "He brought him to *Jesus.*" To whom should he have been brought but unto him? He had the words of eternal life. In vain would he have been brought to the princes of the world; to the philosophers of antiquity; to the moralists of the age; to the Scribes and Pharisees; to Moses; to the law—Moses wrote of him; and the law was a schoolmaster, to bring men to Christ, that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the deeds of the law. To him, says Isaiah, shall men come. To him, said the dying Jacob, shall the gathering of the people be. There alone they can find the wisdom they need; the pardon they need; the peace they need; the strength they need. In him they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places—Neither is there salvation in any other.

Who was brought? It was Simon Peter—"He brought *him* to Jesus." He is a character frequently and largely noticed in the Sacred History. For, in consequence of this introduction, he became not only a disciple of Jesus, but a preacher of the Gospel, and an Apostle; and from the low occupation of a fisherman he was made a fisher of men; and by one cast of his net he gained three thousand souls. Let us endeavour to bring men to the Saviour, remembering that we know not what he will do, not only in them, but for them, and by them. While he saves them he may also employ and dignify them. However unlikely at present they appear, we may by-and by observe them, with joyful surprise, and adoring gratitude, not only as Christians, but as ministers in his Church; and extensively serving their generation, according to the will of God. *Whatever* condition they may fill, or office they may discharge, they will be, must be, useful. Like their father Abraham, they will be not only blessed, but blessings. In converting one we do good to many—Who ever went to heaven alone?

We may also ask—*Who* brought him? It was Andrew—"*He* brought him to Jesus." Andrew had been for some little time with Jesus himself; and he immediately evinces the influence of the intercourse on his own mind, by his concern to bring others to the same Saviour. And there is nothing peculiar in this. They who have seen his glory will be sure to proclaim his worth. They that have tasted that the Lord is gracious themselves will be always constrained to invite others—*O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.* And they always speak of him best who speak from experience.

Andrew was not only acquainted with Jesus, but he was also related to Peter. *He first findeth his own brother Simon,* and saith unto him—We have found the Messias. The expression intimates that he also prevailed upon others, but that he *began* with him. His finding him *first* might have been accidental; but it is much more probable that it was by design. He thought, and he thought justly, that his own brother had, though not an exclusive, yet a prior claim to his attention. And therefore, while many lead their friends and relations, their own flesh and blood, into the haunts of dissipation, the counsel of the ungodly, the way of sinners, the seat of the scornful, and so bring them to the devil; Andrew *instantly* performed towards Simon, his own brother, a brother's part—And he brought him to Jesus.

Let us not forget this. We are to disregard none of our fellow-creatures; but surely those who are connected with us by the ties of friendship and of nature have the first right to our solicitude. How is it possible for us to think of them, and not exclaim, with Esther, in the dread of a more tremendous perdition—How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred? In endeavouring to do good to these, we have also greater opportunities and advantages, by reason of our influence and easiness of access. Let then grace sanctify and engage in her service all the force and endearment of natural affection. Let the pious sister pray for, and plead with, an irreligious brother. Let the godly wife strive to save her own husband. Let the husband allure to accompany him the desire of his eyes. And oh! let parents awaken and blend their anxieties and efforts to bring to Jesus their children. When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, all the wounded were to obtain cure by looking. But children were bitten as well as men and women. Had we been there, we should have seen many a father leading along his little daughter to a

place of vision; and many a mother pressing near with her infant son in her arm, and pointing his eyes to catch the shining remedy. So has the Son of man been lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The young need him; and the sooner they are brought to him the better. The sooner will they be prevented from injuring society: the sooner will they enter on a course of usefulness, during which they will scatter a thousand blessings. If we do good to an old man, it is all-important to himself; but then it goes off with him. Whereas the good communicated to a child is not only valuable personally, but relatively. It descends from him, and is spread by him, as he rises up and multiplies in life: and the result of the whole cannot be estimated.

And if we bring them to him, will he reject or despise them? Let his command determine this—"Feed my lambs." Let his conduct decide it—"They brought young children to him that he should touch them. And his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

Let those that *have* children, and let those that *are* children, think of this, and be encouraged.

> "A flower when offered in the bud,
> Is no vain sacrifice."

Another flower thus offered can never arrive at perfection. It must wither and die. But this flower shall live and blossom as a rose. The Redeemer will put it into his bosom: and the fragrance shall spread through the church below and the temple above.

SEPTEMBER 27.

"*And he brought him to Jesus.*"—John i. 42.

What Andrew here did with Simon, we are to do with our fellow-creatures—We are to bring them *to Jesus.*

But can men be brought to him *now?* Did he not say, I am no more in the world? How happy were they who lived when he was on earth! They could repair to him in every trouble, and tell him every distress. Ye benevolent neighbours! you could carry the paralytic, and place him beneath the very eye of mercy. You anxious father! you could go to him, and say, "Sir, come down ere my child die." You Martha and Mary, as soon as Lazarus was afflicted, you could send to him, saying, "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick." And cannot you, my dear readers, apprize him of your desire or your grief! Have not you at your disposal a messenger that you can despatch to him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? "While they call, I will answer; and when they speak, I will hear." And has he not said, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world! and wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you? If these words be true, he is with his ministers and people now. Though no longer visible, he is accessible. We may apprehend him as to his essential presence, by which he fills heaven and earth. We may apprehend him also as to his peculiar presence, by which he is nigh to them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. He is to be found in the Scriptures. In his house. At his table. On his throne. In the garden and the field—

> "Where'er we seek him he is found,
> And ev'ry place is holy ground."

But can *we* bring souls to him? Not efficiently. This is the work of God only. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And the sooner we are convinced of this the better. We shall then make all our attempts in dependence on the agency of his Spirit; and thus honouring him, he will honour us. But we may do this instrumentally. For God makes use of means: and he employs *men.* And employs them not only to do good to their fellow-creatures temporally, but spiritually; not only to relieve their bodies, but to save their souls. And various and many are the ways in which we may thus bring men to Jesus. We may do it by intercession; for he hears prayer for others as well as for ourselves. We may do it by the influence of example. Nothing speaks so loud as the silent eloquence of a holy, consistent, and lovely life. By this wives may win their husbands without the word; and servants may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. By this *all* may be useful. All cannot be learned; all cannot be rich: but all may be exemplary. We may do it by instruction. Thus Andrew brought Peter—We have found, says he, the Messias. And thus the woman of Samaria brought her neighbours, saying, Come, see a man that told me all that ever I did: Is not this the Christ? By a word fitly spoken—a letter—an invitation to hear the Gospel—the commendation of a good book—the diffusion of the Bible—the sending forth missionaries—the supporting of ministers, whose office it is to turn men from darkness to light—By all these, and many more, we may be the means of introducing souls to Jesus.

But *why* should we be concerned to bring them? Four things should make us alive to this work. First. To feel a concern for it is an evidence of grace; and an evidence the most decisive. Indeed every other evidence is fallacious without this: and this is always to be found in a real Christian. For however

he may walk in darkness, as to a knowledge of his own interest in divine things, and draw the conclusion that he has no part nor lot in the matter; he never is insensible and indifferent to the success of the Gospel and the salvation of souls. Secondly. To attempt it is a duty. A duty that cannot be declined, without the greatest guilt. A duty arising from the relation in which we stand to our fellow-men, as bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. A duty enforced by the will of God, clearly made known in the injunction, As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men; and what good can equal this! Thirdly. To accomplish it is the most glorious enterprise. What is the rescue of a whole nation from civil bondage compared with the deliverance of one soul from the power of darkness, and translating it into the kingdom of God's dear Son! Can a trifle throw heaven into ecstacy! Yet there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. The work, therefore, is its own motive: its success is its own recompence. And so the Apostle deemed it—"If a man err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Fourthly. To fail in it is no disgrace. Yea, failure here is infinitely more honourable than success in any other enterprise. But wise and good efforts are never in vain. If they are useless as to the direct object, they do good collaterally. If they relieve not the beneficiary, they bless the benefactor. His prayers and endeavours return not void into his own bosom. We are a sweet savour of Christ, not only in them that are saved, but in them also that perish. The promise is not made to success—for *this* does not belong to us; but to exertion—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

But while we endeavour to bring others to Jesus, let us see to it that we have come to him ourselves. It is awful to think of being the instruments of his grace, while we are not the subjects—

> "Great King of grace! my heart subdue;
> I would be led in triumph too:
> A willing captive to my Lord,
> And sing the victories of his word."

SEPTEMBER 28.

"*The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!*"—Lam. iv. 2.

Such is the difference between the judgment of God and the spirit of the world, concerning the precious sons of Zion. In the estimation of God, (and his judgment is always according to truth,) they are comparable to gold, yea, fine gold. And they are so for their rareness, and their purity, and their value, and their durability, and for their bearing the severest probation, and, instead of being injured by the trial, deriving improvement, and lustre, and usefulness from it.

But as that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God; so that which is approved and commended of God is undervalued and despised by men. The world, therefore, knoweth them not. It knew *him* not. Their Lord and Saviour was despised and rejected by them. And they, as his followers, are esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter. Natural men judge only from sense and outward appearances; and Christians are often poor and afflicted. They see the outside of the tabernacle; and this is covered with goats' skins and badgers' skins, dyed red: but they never enter the holy place, nor approach him who sitteth between the cherubims. They are sensual, not having the Spirit; and spiritual things are spiritually discerned. They do not feel their need of the blessings which constitute the happiness and glory of the children of God, and therefore prize not the possessors of them. Yea, the carnal mind is enmity against God, and causes them to dislike every thing that bears his impression and likeness.

Yet even these despisers shall behold, and wonder, and perish. When the delusions of time shall give place to the unveiled realities of eternity, they will be compelled to exclaim, *we* fools counted their lives madness, and their end to be without honour. How are they numbered with the saints, and their lot is among the children of God! Yea, even now there are moments, when, if we could witness the workings of conviction, we should hear many a Balaam admiring, and praying; How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

Christians should not be uneasy and impatient under the mistakes and reproaches of their adversaries. It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment. He that judgeth them is the Lord. Their praise is not of man, but of God. They should know that this is not their day. Their day is coming. It will be the manifestation of the sons of God. Yea, conscious of what, by the grace of God, they are, they should learn in whatsoever state they are therewith to be content. In every thing they should give thanks. Their souls should make their boast in the Lord. They should never scruple to extol and recommend their privileges and excellences. That which we have heard and seen, says the Apostle John, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us. And is this desirable? And truly our fellowship is

with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Who is on the Lord's side? O my soul! art thou? Dost thou love and admire those whom God approves and honours? Canst thou call the saints that are in the earth, The excellent! and say, In them is all my delight! Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

SEPTEMBER 29.

"*Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest.*"—Micah ii. 10.

One of the old Divines, in his pastoral admonitions to his people, exhorts them—not to look for that in the law, which can only be found in the gospel—not to look for that in themselves, which is only to be found in Christ—not to look for that in the creature, which is only to be found in the Creator—and not to look for that on earth, which is only to be found in heaven.

The present is not our rest. It was not *designed* to be our rest. It is not *fit* to be our rest. And if we are Christians, we have *relinquished* it as our rest, and have chosen another.

Yet who does not need this exhortation? Our souls naturally cleave unto the dust. Many, like Reuben and Gad, prefer an inheritance on this side Jordan. And even the godly themselves, who have not their portion in this life; but have said, As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness; even these need to have their pure minds stirred up, by way of remembrance. "My people," says God, "have forgotten their resting-place."

He therefore, who takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, sends them this message, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest." And there are five messengers by which he sends it.

The first, is his Word. And we should read and hear it for this very purpose. It meets us in our complaint and inquiry, "Who will show us any good?" and says, "Acquaint now thyself with *Him*, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee." It forbids us to lay up treasures on earth. It commands us to seek those things that are above. It denounces the curse and misery of making flesh our arm. It proclaims the grandeur of the soul; and sets before us what alone is worthy of its ardour. It leads us into all truth; and places us at the foot of the Cross, by which the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.

The second, is affliction. God speaks by the rod, as well as by the word. While he chastens us with his hand, he teaches us out of his law. Has he not, by events, plainly addressed us, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain; turn ye, and take your journey!" Has he not, by repeated frustrations of our hope, plainly said to us, "Let it suffice thee: speak no more to me of this matter?" Perhaps our purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of our hearts. Perhaps we have been made to possess months of vanity by sickness. Perhaps by death lover and friend has been removed far from us. And, amidst the wreck of every thing dear to us, a voice, though we knew not at first that it came from Heaven, said, "What hast thou here? and what dost thou here?"—And if we are so much attached to the world, with all our losses and distresses, what should we have been without them? If the pilgrim be ever seduced from his way, it is by flowers and prospects: if ever he sits down, and sings himself asleep, it is in a pleasant scene, and in fine weather, not when the sky is dark and stormy, and the road is rough and miry; for then, by contrast, the thought of home becomes dearer; and he feels an excitement to quicken his pace.

The third, is worldly success. This, in some respects, may convince us more of the insufficiency and emptiness of every thing here, than even our deprivations. When a man is unable to attain his object, he may still imagine that there *is* happiness in what he misses; and that he is miserable because he misses it. But when he has gained the prize, he is convinced that the dissatisfaction he feels arises from the nature of the thing itself. We long for certain acquisitions, with all the fondness of hope; and feel no apprehension, unless on the side of failure. We cannot believe, from the acknowledgments of others, that these things will belie expectation, and still leave a void within. But when we have made the trial ourselves; when we have formed the connexion, filled the office, gained the fortune, we desired—and, in the midst of our sufficiency, we are in straits; sigh over our indulgences themselves; and enjoyment, as well as affliction, cries, All is vanity and vexation of spirit—Arise, and depart; for this is not your rest.

The fourth, is the earnests and foretastes of a better world. And such Christians are favoured with, in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; in accesses to the Throne of Grace; in the power and glory of God, which they see in the Sanctuary; and in those sacred moments of divine communion, alone, when they can say,

> "While such a scene of sacred joys
> Our raptur'd eyes and souls employs,
> Here we could sit and gaze away
> A long, an everlasting day"—

And these not only call, but allure and win

the heart, away. When the clusters of grapes were brought to the Israel of God in the Wilderness, they said, in very intelligible language—What does your present condition supply like this?—See what grows in the land that is before you. Taste; and go up and possess it.

The last, is death. Every apprehension and approach of this, cries—"It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed." But this orders us to depart really, as well as morally. God sends, by it, not only *to* his people, but *for* them. And it seems surprising that they should ever be ready to turn away from the messenger. A child at school welcomes every messenger from home *to* him; but he desires most the messenger that comes *for* him. Joseph sends to Jacob, and for him, at once; and his father not only heard his words, but saw his wagons—"Oh! these are really to carry me to him—I shall soon see my son—and die in peace."

Such a messenger, Christian, is death to you. Come, says God; you have toiled long enough—You have feared long enough—You have groaned long enough—Your warfare is accomplished—Enter the rest which the Lord your God giveth you—Come; for all things are now ready.

Yes; you will soon hear the voice saying—O Israel! you must this day go over Jordan. And why should you be unwilling to exchange the desert for the land flowing with milk and honey? Is not this the purpose of your travels? The end of your desires? The completion of your hopes?

"But the swelling river rolls between." Fear not. The ark of the covenant will go before you, and divide the waves: and you shall pass over dry-shod. And then let the streams re-unite, and continue to flow on—you will not wish them to re-open for your return. What is misery to others, is joy to you—"I shall go the way whence I shall not return."

SEPTEMBER 30.

"*If then I be a father, where is mine honour?*" Mal. i. 6.

We admire the Scripture mode of allusion and comparison. Its images are taken from the most obvious and simple things: and while they illustrate the spiritual subjects to which they are applied, they also import moral lessons. While they enjoin the duties we owe to God, they remind us of those we owe to our fellow-creatures. Thus the child is instructed and reproved, by the address which informs and admonishes the Christian.

In the words before us, here is, first, a principle supposed—Indeed it is expressed in the foregoing sentence: "A son honoureth his father." It is a dictate of nature, of custom, of observance in all ages and countries. The child, as soon as he can reason, finds himself under the control of a superior, at once dear and venerable; to whom he is obliged, and on whom he is dependent: he asks of him information; he looks to him for provision: he confides in his care and wisdom: he obeys his orders, and submits to his discipline. If stricken, he does not reproach, or think of striking again. "The eye," says Solomon, "that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pluck it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." A modern writer has made free to turn these words into ridicule, by ranking them with those senseless bugbears by which nurses often terrify children. But if the ignorance of infidels, with regard to every thing scriptural, was not extreme; he might have known, that, under the Jewish law, filial disobedience was a capital offence. "Every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him." And Moses mentions also the mode. "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear." Hence, what is threatened, might have been literally accomplished. But when we consider how figuratively the Easterns expressed themselves; we may admit the reality of an awful penalty on the transgressor without pleading for the literal execution. We have a remarkable instance of filial honour in the regard the Rechabites paid to the authority of their father. "They said, we will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: but we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father

commanded us." It is lamentable to think how little of this obedience is to be found in children now. Yet there is far less piety in the world, than morality.

Here is, secondly, an obligation inferred—It is, that if other fathers are to be honoured, we are much more bound to honour God. For he is a Father far above the truth of the relation in all other cases. We have had fathers; but they were fathers of our flesh—but he is the Father of our spirits. They were fathers only subordinately, and neither the sex, or the form, or the talents of the child resulted from their choice—but he is supremely, efficiently, absolutely our Father—he made us, and endued us with all our powers—and from him must spring all our hopes.

And, therefore, not only is the reality of the relation found in him, but the perfection too. He always acts the part of—a wise and good Father—and always acts it completely—divinely. Other fathers often chastise their children for their own pleasure; but he for our profit. They may be implacable; but he is ready to forgive. They may neglect to educate or provide; but he teaches us to profit, and suffers us to want no good thing.

The duty also is enforced by the eminence of his character, and the grandeur of his condition. His understanding is infinite. His power is almighty. His dominion is everlasting. He is Lord of all. "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; that bringeth the princes to nothing: he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." To this consideration he himself appeals, in the close of this chapter. "Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

Thirdly. Here is a complaint alleged. "If I am a Father, where is mine honour?" And has he no ground for this inquiry! Men often complain without cause. They are unreasonable in their demands and expectations. They may be mistaken with regard to the nature and design of many actions, because they judge after outward appearance. But God's claims are unlimited. He sees motives. He looketh to the heart. He takes our meaning. And passing by our mistakes and infirmities, accepts and commends our aims and endeavours. And yet even he complains. And how deeply deserved! and how extensively applicable is the charge he brings! See the generality of mankind—Have they any concern to please him? Take the professors of his religion—What do they more than others? Take even the subjects of his grace—even in them, Where is his honour? Is it here? in constantly asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Is it here? in meekly submitting to his rebukes? Is it here! in speaking well of his name, and recommending him to others?

Let us make the deficiencies and sins of others a mirror in which to behold our own. Do I meet with ingratitude in a fellow-creature, that I have relieved? Let it soften my resentment, and keep me from resolving to do no more for him. Let me inquire how *I* have behaved towards my heavenly benefactor. Do I reflect on an undutiful child, and perhaps justly too? Yet let me ask whether my heavenly Father has not much more reason to condemn me—If *thou*, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, *who* should stand!

How necessary is it for us to fall down at his footstool; and pray, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified!

What a blessing is the Gospel, that assures us, with the Lord there is mercy, and that his grace is sufficient for us!

Yet let this make us the more concerned to honour him—and to be harmless and blameless—the children of God—without rebuke!

OCTOBER 1.

"Wo unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light."—Amos v 18.

We may apply this to the day of death. How often do men, when in trouble and disappointment, express a wish, that God would now take away their life from them, supposing that it is better for them to die than to live! We cannot, indeed, be always sure of the sincerity of their desire; and they may not be sure of it themselves. Under the pressure of present feeling, they may imagine that death would be welcome: when, perhaps, if it actually appeared, they would decline his aid. And if they *would* not, they *ought* For *their* fleeing from trouble, is as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

Let me, then, beg these sons of sorrow to inquire—Whether the event they long for will be a real remedy for their complaints. Are they sure that death will be annihilation?—perfectly sure that there is nothing beyond the grave?—Can they prove that there is no future state? and that in this state there is no misery but happiness only? Judas hanged himself. But he went to his own place. This was far worse than his former condition, even under all the horrors of remorse.

If the Scripture be true, *all* are not happy at death. Yea, *none* are then happy without a title to heaven, and a meetness for it. And have *you* this title? What is it? "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.

and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Have you this meetness? What is it? Do you love holiness? Without this *could* you be happy in a holy place? in a holy state? in holy company? in holy engagements? in holy enjoyments? Is the Redeemer precious to your souls? and do you delight in him! Without this *could* you be happy, to be for ever in his presence, and hearing for ever his praise! *Could* a man, without an ear or taste for music, be happy by being removed into a world of melody and harmony! Need you be told that happiness does not arise from the excellency of the object, but from its adaptation to our disposition? That nothing can make us happy but what relieves our *wants?* fulfils our *desires?* and satisfies our *hope?* Without holiness, therefore, *no* man *can* see the Lord.

How absurd, then, is it to wish to leave this world for another before you are sure the exchange will be for your advantage! For your advantage it cannot be, if you die unpardoned and unrenewed. Blessed are the dead that die *in the Lord.* But out of Him, you are out of the city of refuge, and the avenger of blood is upon you. Out of Him, you are out of the Ark, and in the midst of the Deluge. No; the day of *your* death is not better than the day of your birth.—Whatever your privations, and losses, and distresses, here may be, they are only the beginnings of sorrow; and all you suffer from them is only as a drop to the ocean, compared with the damnation of hell.—And, once gone from time, there is no return. As the tree falleth so it lies.

Instead, therefore, of wishing this only and all-important season ended, you should be thankful that it is prolonged, if it be continued, even in a vale of tears; and account that the longsuffering of God is your salvation: for he is not willing that any should perish.

Remember, also, that these disappointments and sorrows, which make you so impatient, may prove the greatest blessing; and the valley of Achor be given you for a door of hope. For God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He renders earth desolate to induce you to seek a better country. He strikes away every human prop, and puts failure and vexation into every worldly scheme, that you may turn from idols to the Supreme God, and say—

> "What should I wait or wish for, then,
> From creatures—earth and dust?
> They make our expectations vain,
> And disappoint our trust.
>
> "Now I forbid my carnal hope,
> My fond desires recall;
> I give my mortal interest up,
> And make my God my all."

Away, then, with every thought of desperation. Say, "I will arise, and go unto my Father"—He is in sight, waiting to receive thee graciously, and to love thee freely. Repair to the throne of the heavenly grace—You cannot spread your sorrows *there* in vain. If tempted to despair, try his word. No one ever trusted, and was confounded. Cry, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Come," says the Reliever of every burden —"Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

The Athenian said, "I should have been lost, if I had not been lost." What made the prodigal think of home but want? Where did Manasseh find his father's God but in affliction? We often feel for those who have been reduced; and say, they have seen *better* days—But if in their prosperity they forgot God that made them, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation; and in their adversity have thrown themselves into his arms —these, these are the *best* days they ever saw; and they will draw forth their praise for ever. This, my suffering friend, may be your case—and will be, if you seek unto God, and unto God commit your cause. He can, he will turn the shadow of death into the morning—and you shall join the multitude who are saying, IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED.

OCTOBER 2.

"*I will hear what God the Lord will speak.*"
Psalm lxxxv. 8.

AND surely if *He* speaks, in whatever way he expresses himself, it becomes us to hear; and to hear immediately. Let us not therefore "be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." There are four cases in which we should adopt this resolution.

First. I will hear what God the Lord will speak as to *doctrinal truth.* If error were harmless, we should not be commanded to "buy the truth, and sell it not:" to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." It is of unspeakable importance to have proper sentiments on all religious subjects. But concerning all these subjects different opinions prevail; and it is certain that all these opinions cannot be true. Hence persons are often perplexed, especially at the beginning of the Christian life. And what in this case are we to do? One cries, Lo! here is Chris and another, Lo! there. Be it so. We are not left without witness. It would be sad and dangerous had we no rule to go by; no standard to which we could appeal. But we have such an advantage. And in things of moment it is plain and obvious. And it is accessible; it is in our possession; it is the testimony of God, recorded in the Scriptures. I will therefore make no system of divinity, drawn up by fallible creatures like myself, my oracle; but enter at once the temple of Revelation, and inquire there. I will call no man master upon earth—one is my master, even

Christ; and all besides are only brethren. I need not ask what Arminius, or Calvin, speaks —they themselves are to be judged out of this Book; and what they deliver is no further binding upon me than as *they* can say, "Thus saith the Lord." "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." In this inspired Volume I have the judgment of God himself upon every subject with which it is necessary for me to be acquainted. And I will go to it; not with a previous bias, but open to conviction: not to dictate, but to learn. I will not be influenced to embrace a doctrine, because it is easy of comprehension; or to reject it, because it is mysterious—It is infinitely reasonable to believe *whatever* God speaks; and my only concern is to ascertain what he *has* spoken.

Secondly. I will hear what God the Lord will speak, as to my *movements in life*. How ignorant and short-sighted are we! How liable to mistake! How incapable of distinguishing between appearances and realities; and of deciding what will be good or evil for us! Surely we have erred and suffered enough already, to convince us that "the way of man is not in himself." How much depends on one wrong step, as it regards our comfort, usefulness, and reputation! Even when the iniquity is pardoned, the natural consequences may be long left to operate. They often cannot be remedied; and so repentance is quartered upon the offender all his days. How frequently has this been exemplified in irreligious marriages; and changes of residence and business, through fancy, pride, or avarice; or even good, but mistaken motives! A Christian, therefore, should take every step of importance—and what step may not be important!—feeling a responsibility that makes him tremble! and an anxiety that urges him to seek counsel from above—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak" —and regulate my marches by the cloud. But while I wait upon God, I must also wait for him: and integrity and uprightness are to preserve me while I do so. For He tells me, that if a man sets up idols in his heart, and comes to inquire of him; he will answer him, "but according to his idols." And this is done, not only by a penal influence; but by a natural effect: for every thing will be coloured according to the passion through which I view it. If therefore I do not consult God sincerely, it would be better for me not to do it at all: for it can only dishonour him, and delude myself. But if I go in simplicity, and say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" I come within reach of the promise, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Thirdly. I will hear what God the Lord will speak, as to the *dispensations of his providence*. Nothing is more trying than what an old Divine calls, "a dumb affliction:" so that when we put our ear to it, we can seem to hear nothing, as to what it implies, or intends. Varying the metaphor a little, Job was in such a state of ignorance and perplexity: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." In such a condition, it affords relief to be able to add: "but *he* knoweth the way that I take." Yet duty requires that *we* should have some knowledge of it ourselves. A natural man is only concerned to escape from trouble: but the Christian is anxious to have it sanctified and improved. He is commanded to hear the rod. While God chastens, he teaches. I must therefore be in a learning frame of mind. I must say unto God, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me"—"I will hear what, by this event, God the Lord will speak."

Fourthly. I will hear what He will say, also, *in answer to prayer*. Here is a thing, I fear, generally disregarded. How many petitions are never thought of after they have been delivered! We knock at the door, and go away, and never even look back to see whether it be opened unto us. Can we expect that God will attend to those prayers which we contemn ourselves? Are such addresses any thing better than a mockery of the Supreme Being!

Let us therefore hear what he says in reply to our requests. Is it not pleasing to know that we are not forsaken nor forgotten of our best Friend? To be able to rectify a gloomy conclusion? To reason from the past to the future? And, like a beggar, to derive encouragement from success! "For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee." "I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

OCTOBER 3.

"*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*"—Phil. iv. 5.

—WHAT moderation? Moderation with regard to your appetites. Some make a god of their belly, and glory in their shame. Many indulge in eating and drinking, beyond the

demands of bodily refreshment, or the allowances of health.—Your moderation, with regard to your passions. You are to be angry, and sin not. The sun must not go down upon your wrath. The fear, the joy, the love, the grief, allowable in themselves, may become excessive in the degree.—Your moderation, with regard to the distinctions of life. These are to differ from "the pride of life"—in apparel, in furniture, in servants.—Your moderation in professional pursuits, and the cares of trade—diligent in business, but not "entangling yourselves in the affairs of this life;" content with sober and solid gain; and not, by hazard and speculations, making haste to be rich.—Your moderation in the exaction of rights; whether pecuniary—in declining the rigour of law, for debt; or personal—in waiving the claims of authority and preference, as Abraham did in the case of Lot.—Your moderation, in your opinions and zeal. Many things in religion are of far less importance than others, even if true—But even the truth of them is not easily ascertained; and we see men of equal talent and piety on each side of the question. The truth generally lies in the middle; and he is commonly nearest to it who is abused by both the opposite parties.

And what a reason is there to enforce this admonition!—"The Lord is at hand." The word signifies nigh, either as to place or time. If we take it as to place—it refers to his presence—I am a God at hand, and not afar off. He is about our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. Thus he is always nigh to see and observe, to aid or oppose, to bless or to punish.

—If we take it as to time—it refers to his coming—"The coming of the Lord drawing near." This is true, not only as to the certainty of the event, and the confidence of faith; but as to his real approach. If the Lord was at hand when Paul wrote this Epistle, how much more since near two thousand years have rolled away! But he comes by death—And this, as to consequence, is the same to us, as his coming to judgment. And there is but a step between us and death.

If a multitude of people were assembled together, and behaved tumultuously, and the king was coming along the road—"The king is at hand," would instantly reduce them to order and silence; and every eye would be turned towards *him*. If a number of criminals, forgetful of their condition, were improperly amusing themselves, or striving together; and a signal told them, the judge was entering the town to try them—what an effect would this instantly have upon their mind and their conduct! But what is your case? He is not only your Sovereign, but your Judge—And "behold, the Judge STANDETH BEFORE THE DOOR!"

How lamentable is it, that to enforce what is wise, and just, and good in itself, we should need such motives. And how sad is it that these motives, after all, should have so little influence over us! That we should be constantly reminded of such a Being—led back to the grace of his first coming—and forward, to the glory of his second coming—and think, and feel, and speak, and act, and live as we do! "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

OCTOBER 4.

"*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*"—Prov. iv. 18.

WHAT does this fine image imply? What does it express? Solomon traces the resemblance between the path of the just and the rising light, in three articles. Each *shines*. Each shines *more and more*. Each shines more and more *unto the perfect day*.

The rising light *shines*. It is the very nature of it to do so. It thus shows itself, and renders other things visible: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Without this, the works of the field, and the human face divine, would be all a blank. But the shining of the light lays open their beauties, and fills us with admiration and praise. Thus the Christian's path breaks out of obscurity; the darkness is past; and the true light shineth. His religion is not only real, but apparent. And as it need not, and should not be hid; so it will not, and cannot be hid. Its operation will evince its existence. Its principles will display themselves in its practice. There will be the work of faith, and the labour of love, and the patience of hope, and the fruit of the Spirit. Pity will get into the eye. Meekness will smile in the features. The law of kindness will dwell upon the tongue. The hand, ready to communicate, will unawares slide into the pocket—They that were in darkness will show themselves; and, in a thousand ways, their light will shine before men.

But the *shining* of the rising light is noble and glorious. It is one of the most splendid appearances in nature. The rising sun is a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. We hardly wonder the poor Heathen, in the absence of Revelation, should worship it. The lustre is often too powerful for the naked eye. And how was it with Moses, after communion with God! His face shone so that the Israelites could not steadfastly behold the glory of his countenance. He was not aware of it himself, till, seeing the people dazzled, he was obliged to take a veil. And the humility of the Christian may keep him from perceiving his own excellences; but others will take knowledge of them: and his profiting will appear unto all men And nothing is so impressive and influentia

as the life of a Christian, when he walks worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called. It was not necessary for the first believers at Jerusalem to lay down rules, to exclude improper characters from their communion—Their purity, their dignity, their majesty, repelled them—"And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but all the people magnified them."

Yet the *shining* of the rising light is not mere lustre. It is a source of usefulness, as well as of admiration. It warms and enlivens. It fertilizes the gardens and the fields. It makes the valleys to stand thick with corn, and the little hills to rejoice on every side. And so Jesus went about doing good. And so Christians are blessings in all the places wherein they move. Let us make this image our model in our endeavours to serve our generation. The sun says nothing—It does good without noise—It shines unasked, constantly, impartially—It rises on the evil, as well as on the good—So may we be merciful.

But the shining light shines *more and more*. So does the path of the just. His religion is a gradual and progressive thing. We therefore read of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Of the Thessalonians, it is said, Their faith grew exceedingly; and the love of every one of them towards each other abounded. As far as we are stationary in our attainments, we are censured and condemned by the image. But to derive comfort from it, it is not necessary that we should be every thing at once. Nothing in nature reaches its perfection suddenly. The babe proceeds, by slow degrees, into the man. The blade precedes the full corn in the ear. Let us not despise the day of small things. What was the oak once, but an acorn! What is the dawn, to the noon!

But the shining light shines more and more *unto the perfect day*. The allusion is not taken from a meteor, that blazes for a moment, and then disappears. Nor from the morning cloud and early dew, that soon passeth away: but from the rising sun, that always attains its end, and completes what it begins—rising upwards—and shining—onwards—till it is day—perfect day.

When did the sun ever make a dawn, and not carry it into full day? Who can drive him back, or stop his course! If it had enemies, and they cursed its beams, the rage would be as vain as it would be unreasonable—"He rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." So shall it be with all those who are set in motion for eternity by divine grace. "They that love him shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." There is no enchantment or divination against them. In all opposition they shall be more than conquerors. He who is the author, shall also be the finisher of their faith. They shall soon loose all their infirmities. They shall emerge into perfect knowledge, holiness, and joy—And "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

Who can help recalling the beautiful lines of Dr. Watts, which, though written for the infant mind, are worthy the perusal of angels?

"How fine has the day been, how bright was the sun,
How lovely and joyful the course that he run;
Though he rose in a mist when his race he begun,
And there follow'd some droppings of rain!
But now the fair traveller 's come to the west,
His rays are all gold, and his beauties are best;
He paints the sky gay, as he sinks to his rest,
And foretels a bright rising again.

"Just such is the Christian—his course he begins,
Like the sun in a mist, while he mourns for his sins,
And melts into tears; then he breaks out and shines,
And travels his heavenly way:
But when he comes nearer to finish his race,
Like a fine setting sun, he looks richer in grace,
And gives a sure hope, at the end of his days,
Of rising in brighter array."

OCTOBER 5.

"*Who is gone into heaven.*"—1 Peter iii. 22.

Many had gone there before. Abel was the first that entered; and 'tis encouraging to think, that the first victim of death was a partaker of glory. Human nature was found in heaven, before it was seen in hell. How long he was alone there we know not. But others soon followed: and our Saviour must have found there, a multitude which no man could number.

But though many had gone into heaven before, none of them had gone in the same way and manner with himself. Others had entered without their bodies; but he had entered incarnately. Two had indeed entered embodied; but they did not take their bodies from the grave. Enoch and Elias died not, but were only changed. Jesus died, and was buried; and passed to glory from the tomb. Others entered heaven by mere favour, presenting no claim from their worthiness and obedience: but he entered by merit—He deserved all the glory he obtained—It was no more than the reward of his doing and suffering. Others entered as private individuals; and their entering did not insure the entrance of others—not even of their friends and relations. Religion is a personal thing; and it could not be inferred, that because the husband or the father was glorified the wife or child would follow. But he entered as a public character, as the head and representative of his people: and because he lives, they shall live also. Hence says the Apostle, "He hath quickened us together with Christ, and

raised us up, and made us sit together with him in the heavenly places."

It is expedient for us, therefore, that he went away: and as Joseph's going from the prison to the palace was not only his own advancement, but the salvation of his father's house; so Jesus is gone into heaven, not only to be crowned with glory and honour, but to execute the remainder of his mediatorial work, on behalf of the redeemed. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." But did he not say, when he expired, "It is finished!" He did—and it *was* finished—and nothing could be *added* to it. But *what* was finished? The procuring of salvation only—not the application of it. The former was done upon the cross: the latter is done upon the throne. What he suffered to acquire, he is exalted to bestow. He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Even in his priestly character it behoved him not only to suffer, but to enter into his glory. The Apostle therefore says, If he were on earth, he could not be a priest; because he could then only have fulfilled one part of the office. For the high priest not only offered the sacrifice, but entered the holy place—and sprinkled the blood upon the mercy-seat—and burned incense—and made intercession for the people. Jesus, therefore, after dying for us, entered into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us. By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us—"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Here he fought, and overcome. But the Conqueror must have his triumph. He must display his spoils, and enrich the multitude. He therefore ascended on high, leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

He was a prophet, by his own preaching. But how local, how confined, and successless was his personal ministry! The work was to be done by another ministry. Corporeally, he was to withdraw; "But," said he, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." Thus *he* considered his personal presence and agency far inferior to the dispensation of the Spirit. And yet some are looking for his bodily advent again, as if this was to effect what the Holy Ghost could not accomplish. What purpose is to be executed in the spread of the Gospel? or the conversion of souls! or the glorification of the Church! to which the energy of the Spirit is not adequate? Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.—Were he here in his body he would be confined to one place at a time, and many would envy the honour of seeing him in vain. But in his Spirit, he can be everywhere, and enjoyed of all, at once.

OCTOBER 6.

"*I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*"—Psalm xxxix. 12.

So life was viewed and felt by David. He was very superior to many of his ancestors. He had wealth, and power, and honour, and reigned the greatest monarch of the East. But no condition can make the heir of immortality a citizen here. Others are strangers and sojourners, as to the transitoriness of their continuance in this world, and the certainty of their removal from it; but not as to their disposition. They mind earthly things: and would be glad to live here always. But the child of God is, in principle, what he is in fact; and in experience, what he is in destination. He is also born from above, and bound for glory. And though he is detained here in a foreign land for awhile, for the discharge and the management of certain duties and interests, yet he thinks, even while thus engaged, of leaving it, in due time, for his own country—where his best relations reside—where lies his inheritance—and where he is to dwell for ever.

"There is my house, my portion fair;
My kindred and my friends are there,
And my abiding home:
For me my elder brethren stay,
And angels beckon me away,
And Jesus bids me come."

Am *I* a stranger and a sojourner with God? Let me realize, let me exemplify, the condition. Let me look for the treatment such characters commonly meet with. Like widows and orphans, they are often imposed upon, and wronged, and injured. They are turned into ridicule and reproach, because of their speech, their dress, their manner, their usages. And Christians are a peculiar people. They are men wondered at. The Saviour tells them not to marvel if the world hates them; for they are not of the world even as he is not of the world. This treat-

ment is in reality a privilege rather than a matter of complaint. It is when I am admired and caressed, and I find every thing agreeable in my circumstances; it is then I feel something of the *settler*. But the disadvantages of my state make me think of home. These induce me to arise, and depart hence, because this is not my rest.

And surely if any of my own nation be near me, I shall be intimate with them. We all know the heart of strangers. We all feel the same preferences. The same hope inspires us. The same end unites us. We shall speak often one to another. We shall contrast our present with our future condition. We shall inquire when we heard from home, and when we think of departing for it, and thus beguile the hours, and relieve the absence.

And let me not be entangled in the affairs of this life. Let me keep myself as detached as possible from things which do not concern me. Let me not embarrass myself as an intermeddler and busy-body in other men's matters. But let me study to be quiet, and to do my own business. Let me pray for the peace of the country through which I am passing. And be thankful for every advantage I enjoy in my temporary exile.

And let my affection be set on things that are above, and my conversation be always in heaven. Let me be—not impatient for home; but prizing it; and longing for it; and judging of myself by my relation to it. Who has not joined in the proverbial sentiment, "Home is home, however homely?" We read of some Swiss soldiers on foreign service, who were so affected with a song that vividly recalled to mind their native valleys, and the houses in which they were born, that the officers were obliged to forbid the use of it. But oh! my Father's house! Here toil; there rest. Here trouble; there joy and gladness. Here darkness; there light. Here sin; there spotless purity. Here the tents of Mesech and Kedar; there the spirits of just men made perfect, and the innumerable company of angels, and the Lord of all. "With such views," says Dr. Goodwin, "let who will be miserable, I will not—I cannot."

OCTOBER 7.

"*I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.*"—Ezek. xxxiv. 15.

This is spoken of the subjects of divine grace.

Individually considered, they are called sheep, to remind us of their personal qualities; their weakness, meekness, gentleness, harmlessness, patience, and submission. Some in their afflictions toss like a wild bull in a net. Lay hold of a swine, and the neighbourhood is alarmed. But observe the fleecy sufferer. She indeed palpitates. And the Christian may palpitate—and tremble—and be ready to faint; but his very manner silently says, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me—Let thy loving-kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

Distinctively considered, they are not all sheep. Many of them are lambs. But these are sheep in nature and degree; and are equally dear to the Shepherd, with the older parts of his charge—Yea, he gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom; and gently leads those that are with young. The margin is, those that have young. Lowth renders it, "The nursing ewes he will gently lead." And we are persuaded that the force of this tender image applies to the lambs, and not to the mothers. If the latter were driven on fast, the former could not keep up with them, especially in rough ground; and thus losing their maternal supplies, would droop and perish.

Collectively they are a flock. And *one* flock only: according to our Saviour's words, "One fold, and one shepherd." Whatever differences there are among them they are only the differences of sheep and of lambs. What difficulty is there in believing this? Essential sameness is not destroyed by circumstantial distinction. Unity is not incompatible with variety. Many branches make but one tree; many members but one body. Bigots would banish harmony from the church of God; for there can be no harmony where all the sounds are the same. God promised that he would give his people one heart and one way. And our Lord prayed that his followers might be one. Have this prayer and this promise been fulfilled? We dare not suppose the contrary: but if they have been accomplished we may see what kind of *oneness* was intended—Not a oneness of opinion; not a sameness in forms of worship, and modes of discipline; for these never have been found: but a oneness, a sameness consistent with the variations that have obtained among them. A unity of spirit. A community of principles. A fellowship of privileges—all being redeemed by the same blood; justified by the same righteousness; renewed by the same grace; and joint heirs of the same glory. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

And is this flock ever forsaken or forgotten by him? "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God." But tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, *where* thou *feedest; where* thou makest thy flock to *rest at noon*. For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

> "Fain would I feed among *thy* sheep;
> Among *them* rest among *them* sleep."

What says David? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

This is grace. What is glory? Hear the angel to John. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

There is another flock in the world. This consists of goats. They also have a shepherd. It is the devil: and they are taken captive by him at his will. He also has under shepherds to do his work; and to him they are amenable; and what a reward will he render them! But his flock, his direful flock—what food! what repose have they! What in time! What in eternity! The way of transgressors is hard. The end of these things is death—the second death. And if any of them should be intermixed with the flock of Christ, and escape detection here—"before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

OCTOBER 8.

"*But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*"—Phil. iv. 6.

This is a simple and pleasing account of prayer—It is the making of our requests known unto God. He indeed knows them perfectly before we express them. But he will know them from us, that we may be properly affected with our own wants, and prepared for the displays of his goodness and grace. And the Apostle reminds us of three things very worthy of our attention with regard to prayer.

First. It is the prevention and cure of care. "Be careful for nothing—*but* in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." All feel anxiety to be a galling load. But the question is, how are we to disencumber ourselves of the burden?—All acknowledge the disorder: and many remedies have been prescribed for the cure. But if some of them touch the paroxysm of the complaint, none of them reach the root of the malady. The commonness of the case; the brevity of time; the uselessness of giving way to solicitude; and the injurious effects of it: all these are true and proper—but they do not go far enough. The fact is, if *we* are not to be careful, *some* one must care for us. And the thing is, and nothing less than this can tranquillize the mind, to be under the management of *Him* who loves us better than we love ourselves, knows unerringly what is good for us, and is able to make every thing conduce to our welfare—"casting all our care on him; for he careth for us." And this is done by prayer. Hezekiah took the letter, and went and spread it before the Lord. Hannah poured out her heart before God, and her countenance was no more sad. In whatever has befallen or foreboded him, every believer has made the trial, and is able to say, with Asaph—"But it is good for me to draw near to God."

Secondly. It is to be very extensively, yea, universally performed. Not in some things, or in many things—but in *every* thing, by prayer and supplication, we are to make known our requests unto God. Some only pray when God's chastening hand is upon them. In their affliction they seek him early. And this, as far as it goes, is not to be censured. Many, like Manasseh, have first sought God in trouble. Prayer is peculiarly seasonable in distress. But though prayer may commence in affliction, it is not to cease with it. It is not to be confined to it. Prayer is equally needful to preserve and sanctify us in prosperity. It is not praying on extraordinary occasions, but on common ones, that evinces a pious frame of mind. Do we delight ourselves in the Almighty? Do we always call upon God? In all thy ways, says Solomon, acknowledge him. It is thus alone we give God the glory of his universal providence: not thinking, with the Assyrians, that he is the God of the hills only, but also of the valleys; and that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Some imagine that many things are too little to be the subjects of prayer. A distinction is indeed to be made between the particularity and minuteness of *private* and *public* prayer—But let us remember that we are not to consider any thing too little to bring before God that God does not deem beneath his notice. And also that it is difficult, if not impossible for us, in many cases, to ascertain what is little. Events the most important often hinge on circumstances apparently the most trivial. Joseph's going to inquire after the welfare of his brethren on the plain seemed a slight thing. Yet he that morning took leave of his father for more than twenty-one years; and went a way by which he never returned. Saul sought his father's asses—a thing that seemed devoid of consequence; but perhaps he is now in hell owing to it—for then began his prosperity, which destroyed him—then Samuel met him, and anointed him king over Israel. You go out, not knowing what a day may bring forth, as to your

happiness or misery—Before the evening you may meet accidentally with a connexion that shall prove a source of joy or suffering through life. "Why this is enough to make one live and move in constant trembling." This is not the design of it: but it *is* designed to induce you—in every thing to commit your way and your works unto the Lord.

Thirdly. It is to be always attended with a pleasing companion—But in every thing, by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God. And does not this imply that we can never approach God without having cause for gratitude? Hence it is said, in every thing give thanks. Whatever be our condition, we have much more to be grateful for than to complain of—Complain! What can ever justify complaint? Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin? Let our losses and afflictions be what they may, he has not dealt with us after our desert, nor rewarded us according to our iniquity. Yea, the trials themselves are the effects of love, and designed to work together for our highest welfare.

And does it not teach us that whenever we go to God to ask for fresh favours, we should be sure to acknowledge the reception of former ones? How seldom is this the case! How much selfishness is there, even in our devotions! How much more of our worship is occupied in petition than in praise! Urged by our necessities we go and call upon God in prayer; but when we have succeeded, we forget to return to give him the glory that is due unto his holy name. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Where is even Hezekiah? *He* rendered not according to the benefit done him.

OCTOBER 9.

"*I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*"—Hosea xiii. 5.

This "Wilderness" means the vast desert in which the Jews wandered for forty years, between Egypt and Canaan. It is characterized by one attribute—"A land of great drought." And this was enough to render it trying. But it was in every respect formidable and repulsive. Witness the language of Jeremiah: "Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness: through a land of deserts, and of pits; through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt."

But *here* God says, "I knew thee." It cannot mean a mere acquaintance with their condition and circumstances: for what can be hid from *Him?* But it intends two things.

First. He knew them there, so as to provide for them. Thus it marks his goodness; and forms a contrast with the conduct of many of our fellow-creatures. A friend is born for adversity; and to him that is afflicted, pity *should* be showed from his friend. But, alas! this is rarely exemplified. They who were intimate enough with their connexions before, scarcely know them when they are in distress. The flower which, when fresh and fragrant, was put into the bosom, is, when withered and dry, thrown away. The garden which, while yielding every kind of gratification, is constantly visited, is deserted in winter. But it is otherwise with God. Though he never leaves his people, he has peculiarly promised to be with them in trouble. David acknowledged this: "Thou hast known my soul in adversities." And has he not known our souls in the same state? Has he not been better to us than our fears? Has he not proved himself "a very present help in trouble?" So it was with Israel—He found them in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness. The situation afforded them no supplies, but he allowed them to want no good thing. He led them by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—healed the bitter waters of Marah—fetched them honey out of a rock, and oil out of the flinty rock—rained down manna upon them—suffered not their raiment to wax old upon them, nor their foot to swell in travelling—vanquished their enemies—gave them ordinances—and sent his Holy Spirit to instruct them—so that Moses well said, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord!"

Secondly. He knew them there, so as to approve of them, and acknowledge them. It is undeniable that the word *know* has this meaning, when it is said, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." "If any man love God, the same is known of him." "Know them that labour among you." But *did* God *thus* know them in the wilderness? Not absolutely, but comparatively. They followed him out of Egypt, and not one lingered behind. At the Red Sea they sang his praise. At Sinai they cheerfully and unreservedly acceded to his covenant. And though they were guilty of many perversenesses and rebellions, yet they never wholly relinquished his worship, and established idolatry and wickedness by a law, as they afterwards did in Canaan. While we dwell on imperfections, God loves to make the best of things. Sarah spake unadvisedly with her lips: but she uttered one good thing—she called Abraham, Lord; and this only is mentioned to her praise. Job cursed the day of his birth: but when James refers to him, we hear only of the patience of Job. And observe God's *gracious* testimony concerning Israel at this period: "Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of

thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord."

Adversity will not of itself secure godliness. Persons may be reduced, and not humbled. They may be afflicted, and God not know them in their distress. Yet, in general, if you observe others, and review your own experience, you will find times of affliction have been more friendly to religion, than seasons of ease and prosperity.

When has God known your conscience most wakeful, and your heart most watchful against sin? Before I was afflicted, says David, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.

When has God known your souls most weaned from the world, and willing to leave it? When all was agreeable and inviting? Or when every thing conspired to tell you, that this is not your rest?

When has He known you value most the communion of saints; the means of grace; the preaching of the Word? When did your eye bedew your Bible? When, pressing the Sacred Volume to your bosom, did you say, Unless thy laws had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction?

When has he known you most frequently and earnestly addressing the Throne of his Grace? In their affliction they will seek me early In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. Even the Saviour himself, being in an agony, prayed more earnestly. "O my people," says he here—"you and I were better acquainted in the wilderness, when you were in a low condition. You were then left to my immediate care; and you lived daily by faith. Then you made me many a visit —But now we seldom meet."

Such is the effect of indulgence, and of fulness. He therefore immediately adds, "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me."

OCTOBER 10.

"*And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.*" Numb. x. 12.

If the Jews, as the Apostle assures us, were our ensamples, in nothing do they more represent the experience of Christians, than in their progress from Egypt to Canaan.

They had now continued many months in the wilderness of Sinai, where the law was given, and all the ordinances of divine worship were established. There they had committed idolatry, and provoked the Most High to anger: and there he proved himself the just God and the Saviour. He forgave their iniquities, but took vengeance on their inventions. They were now to enter the wilderness of Paran, a vast desert of nine days' journey; and where the greater part of their subsequent stations were fixed. "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." *Thus they only marched from one wilderness into another.* And is not this the case with all our changes in this world? Let us look at a few of them; and we shall see, that whatever they may promise—as to satisfaction and happiness—they leave us much the same as they find us.

Is it not so when we pass from one *period* to another? Every age has been full of complaints; and here it is remarkable, instead of supposed improvement, the inquiry has always been, "what is the cause that the former days were better than these?" We end one year with a kind of gloom, and hail the arrival of another: but the months are found the same with those which had previously passed away. The winter is not without cold, nor the summer without heat. We feel in our early days the confinement of school, and the restraints of a father's house; we long to be at our own disposal, and to enter life for ourselves. But where is the man that has not exclaimed, "O that I was as in the days of my youth!" Much is said of an agreeable and peaceable old age. Who does not desire many days, that he may see good? yet is their strength labour and sorrow. Another girds, and leads us whither we would not. In vain we look around for our early and endeared connexions—Lover and friend is put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. The days are come, in which we say, "I have no pleasure in them." "All that cometh is vanity."

Is it not the same when we pass from one *residence* to another? There are few but have known local changes; and some by a train of events, have been led to pitch their tents in situations the most remote from all their former expectations. Sometimes a removal is not at our own option. In other cases it seems very inviting and desirable. It may have preferable claims. But still it is a removal *in* the wilderness, not out of it. To Abraham, God said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will tell thee of;" and this was the Land of *Promise*—Yet even there he shared in the troubles of his nephew, Lot—went for years without an heir to his wealth—was tried in offering up his son Isaac—and buried his Sarah out of his sight, in the cave of Machpelah. There, by faith, he sojourned as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles—not at home—but looking for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Is it not the same when we go from one *condition* to another? Many deem it a fine thing to pass from obscurity to splendour, forgetful that distinction and fame will draw forth envy, and excite evil speaking, and deprive us of the sweets of retirement and leisure. David rose from a shepherd's cottage, to the grandeur of a palace, and then sighed, "O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away, and be at rest." How wise was the Shunamite! When Elisha offered to speak for her to the king: "I dwell," said she, "among mine own people." Some deem it a great thing to rise from indigence to wealth. By their eagerness to acquire it, all seem to think, if they could have affluence they should want nothing. But does a man's life consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth! His desires increase with his means; and in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits. The same may be said in passing from activity to leisure. "Oh!" says one, "when I have acquired so much, and can withdraw from the world where I have been so tried, I *shall* be happy." But to withdraw from the world is not so easy. Habits form a second nature. Few are qualified either to improve, or to enjoy solitude. No kind or degree of exertion is so much at variance with happiness, as having nothing to do. Ennui is an insect that preys upon all bodies at rest. Satan found David alone; and Eve alone. It is the will of Nature and Providence that we should pass from individual into social life; and Solomon says, He that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord. And the conjugal condition, wisely and piously entered, in a general way, admits of more happiness than any other. But it may produce the keenest anguish. At best, it cannot yield pure and unalloyed felicity—our affections become sources of anxiety and fear—we share the pains, as well as the pleasures, of those who are one with us—and every delightful tie is mortal. How impatient are some to enter the parental relation! Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. But the proverb truly calls them, certain cares, and uncertain comforts. How often do the father and mother mourn over undutifulness! depravity! an early grave! Childhood and youth are vanity.

"This is a very gloomy view of things"—But is it not a true one? a Scriptural one? And if so, should it not check presumption and vain confidence? Should it not inspire sober and moderate expectation, with regard to every earthly scene—in those who are just entering life?—and in those who are on the verge of any change in it?

Is there, however, nothing to encourage and comfort under such a dispensation? Much every way. Such a state of things is not *casual*—"The children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." Therefore, though they removed from one desert into another, it was under the Lord's guidance and conduct. He determines the bounds of our habitation, and administers all our comforts and our crosses. Such a state of things we are not *unapprized of:* and therefore, if we go on, buoyed up with hopes, which must issue in disappointment, the fault is our own. All history, observation, experience, and Scripture, tell us enough to prevent it.—Such a state, too, is not *peculiar* to us—It has been known by all our brethren who were before us in the world, and will be realized by all those who come after us.—Nor is it our *final* state. Another is discovered and promised. There remaineth a rest for the people of God: a better, even a heavenly country. A few more stages, and we shall remove to the glory of all lands. No thorns there; no dangers there. After all our movements in the wilderness, we shall move out of it; and the days of our mourning will be ended. Neither is it an *unmixed* state. If we are not in Canaan, the desert we are in is not like Egypt, from whence we came out. Like the Jews, we have many advantages and comforts, though the place itself yields us nothing. We have the fiery cloudy pillar; and water from the rock; and the manna; and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; and the grapes from Eshcol; and God himself, "even our own God," who is nigh unto us in all that we call upon him for.—Yea, the very difficulties, mortifications, and distresses of the state are *useful.* They try us, and humble us, and do us good with regard to our latter end. But for these, how unwilling should we be to go. How vain would the admonition be, "Arise and depart;" unless it were enforced with the conviction—"This is not your rest."

Let this, therefore, keep us from the murmurings of discontent, and the forebodings of despondency. Though serious, let us not be gloomy. And while free from delusive hopes, let us not yield to unbelieving fears, but thank God, and take courage.

OCTOBER 11.

"*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*"—Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

From another Scripture, it would seem that he ascended from Mount Olivet. But there is no contradiction here. The same eminence is intended—On the one side of it, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he suffered; on the opposite side, stretching down to Bethany, he was received up into glory. And we see

the latter was some considerable distance from the former: for, of the attendants at his ascent it is said, "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey."

Thither he seems to have led his disciples for the sake of abstraction and privacy. He had said before his death, "The world seeth me no more." They had seen him, and believed not. To what purpose should other proofs be displayed before those on whose minds all his miracles had made no impression? And here was a sufficient number to attest the fact: and reason cannot question the competency of these witnesses, either as to capacity or sincerity.

But how wonderful and pleasing is the manner in which he took his leave! His disciples had often tried him. They had always betrayed great imperfections; and after all their professions of attachment to him, as soon as he was apprehended, they all forsook him, and fled. He might well have cast them off: but he loved them unto the end. He might have forgiven them; and yet have left them unseen—or silently—or with a frown—or with a rebuke—and this would almost have broken their hearts: but, "he lifted up his hands, and blessed them!" Thus proclaiming the most cordial forgiveness; thus assuring them, that they might rely on his remembering them when he was come into his kingdom.

Dr. Priestly is much perplexed about his present residence and employment. It would appear, he says, from some intimations in the Epistles, as if he still had occasionally something to do with the Church; but what this is we cannot conjecture. And there is no doubt, says he, but he is now somewhere on earth: for what relation can he have to any other planet?—But *we* are assured that while he blessed his disciples, he was parted from them, "and carried up into *heaven*." Where this is we are not informed. But it is obviously a place: for he was clothed in a body like our own; and, corporeally, he cannot be every where. But wherever he *thus* is, there is heaven. And this accords with his own language—"I go to prepare *a place* for you." And though heaven is to be considered *more* as a state than a place, and though even now our happiness does not depend essentially upon local situations, yet these have their importance—And what beautiful and enchanting places have we seen, and heard of, and imagined? But "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." What a residence was Eden before the fall of the first Adam! But this fell infinitely short of the excellency of the abode of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven—

"Oh! the delights, the heavenly joys,
The glories of the place,
Where Jesus sheds the brightest beams
Of his o'erflowing grace!"

Well, let us think of him where he now is; and let us inquire what is our duty with regard to him. Hear Paul—"Seeing, then, that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." We need not be afraid to own him—for he is able to take care of us however we may be exposed. We need not be ashamed to avow him—for he has every thing to induce us to glory in him. Some comparative excuse might be made for Peter. When he denied him he was a prisoner at the bar, and going to be crucified as a malefactor. But where is he when we deny him? In the midst of the throne—crowned with glory and honour—the Lord of all.

Let us follow him in our thoughts and affections. Why seek we the living among the dead? He is not *here*. He is in heaven: and where our treasure is, there should our hearts be also. Let us therefore have our conversation in heaven; and seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. There some of us have much to interest us now—We seem more related to another world than this—and, reflecting upon our losses, we sigh, and say, "What do I *here?* and what have I *here?*" How many among the blessed can we reckon up, who we feel are drawing us after them! But here is the principal attraction—

"Jesus, my all, to heav'n is gone;
He whom I fix my hopes upon;
His track I see, and I'll pursue
The narrow path, till him I view."

And let us rejoice in the expectation of being for ever with him. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." The anchor that holds the ship is cast out of it: and our hope must go out of ourselves. The anchor lays hold of something invisible: and our hope enters heaven. Yet it would find nothing as the ground of its grasp *there* if *he* was not there—But he *is* there—and there for *us*—and *his* being there insures *our* arrival. He is the forerunner of the whole company. He said, as he entered, "I am come; and all my people are coming." Unless we are there also he would be disappointed; for he prayed, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory." He would be unfaithful; for he said, "Where I am there shall also my servants be." He would be imperfect; for he is the bridegroom, and they are the bride; he is the head, and they are the members of his body.

O blessed confidence! let me feel thy influence in every duty and in every trial.

Henry, after a sweet representation of the place, exclaims, "If this be heaven, O that I was there!" How matchlessly simple and affecting does Bunyan end his story of Christian and Hopeful, after they had passed the river and approached the shining city, the object of all their solicitude!—"Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them. And, behold, the city shone like the sun. The streets, also were paved with gold. And in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps, to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one to another, without intermission, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord.' And after that, they shut up the gates—WHICH WHEN I HAD SEEN, I WISHED MYSELF AMONG THEM."

OCTOBER 12.

"*I am the good Shepherd.*"—John x. 14.

To prove, or rather to exemplify his goodness, let us consider his sheep in three periods and conditions; and observe his conduct towards them in each.

First. See them in their *natural* state. Thus they were fallen and guilty creatures; in want and danger; and ready to perish. Here his goodness appeared in undertaking their cause, and engaging to be their shepherd. For nothing but goodness could have induced him to do this. He was under no power or authority to constrain him—He was influenced by no application or desire in the subjects of his pity—And he was not ignorant of what the interposition would cost him. He knew that if he would be their shepherd, he must bleed and die. What says the Church! "All we, like sheep, have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." What says he himself! "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And all this he suffered, not complainingly, but with inexpressible alacrity and pleasure—I delight to do thy will—How am I straitened till it be accomplished!—Nor was this all. After he had redeemed them by his blood, he had to search, and find them; and bring them from their wanderings into his fold. Hear his own representation—He goeth after that which is lost in the wilderness until he find it. And when he has traversed the desert, weary, and wounded by the thorns and briers, and has found it, what does he! Does he complain of his privations, fatigues, and sufferings! No: he layeth it on his shoulder, REJOICING: and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice *with me;* for I have found the sheep which was lost.

Secondly. View them in their *restored* estate. Here his goodness appears in making such ample and rich provisions for them. For he does not bring them into barrenness. They shall not want. I will feed them in a good pasture.—It appears in affording them repose, as well as food. For they want rest, as well as supplies, especially at noon. And, says he, I will not only feed my flock, but cause them to lie down. He maketh them to lie down in green pastures.—It appears in recalling them when wandering. He restoreth my soul, says David.—It appears in defending them. They shall never perish, says the Shepherd, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.—It appears in accommodating himself so kindly and tenderly to their age and weakness. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Thirdly. See them in their *final* state. *Here* he does much for them; and they are often deeply affected with it, especially when they consider where he found them, and what they once were. But when they look into his promises, they see that he intends to do infinitely more. How great is the goodness which he has laid up for them that fear him! Earth is too narrow to contain it. Time is too short to display it. It doth not yet appear what they shall be. There is a land of pure delight; a better, a heavenly country, prepared to receive them. There is, indeed, a dark valley to pass, before they can enter it. But it is safe, and short, and their shepherd is with them there; and his rod and his staff will comfort them. And when they have passed it, "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Blessed Jesus! how well hast thou said, "I am the good Shepherd."

Let those that belong to him, love him, and honour him with their confidence. Trust in him at all times, ye people. Resign to him all your interests. It is enough that he careth for you. You know his aim. You know that all his ways are mercy and truth.

But are we a part of his charge? Are we sheep? Are we lambs? How may we know this? They are marked—marked in the *ear*—and marked in the *foot*. My sheep *hear* my voice—and they *follow* me.

OCTOBER 13.

"*I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*"—Mal. iii. 17.

If a man spares any one, it will surely be

his own son. The very relation pleads for him. Even a faulty child is a child still; and is not easily turned out of doors, like a servant. Absalom had risen in rebellion against his father; and David was compelled to fight with his own son—But said he, on the eve of the battle, deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom! Who can imagine his feelings, while thinking of the action! With what hope and fear was his parental bosom fluttering, when the messenger arrived with the result! Who does not seem to hear his very heartstrings break, as he goes up into the chamber, weeping, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"—But when a son is dutiful; and the father sees that he desires, and aims, and endeavours to please him! Now this is the image God here employs, to raise our confidence the more. I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. In the same strain is our Saviour's tender appeal: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!" God's own children, who serve him, need sparing mercy. It is exercised towards them four ways.

First. He spares them as to exemption. This has often been seen in times of public and general calamity. Does the flood come and sweep away the world of the ungodly? An ark is provided for the saving of Noah and his house. Are the Cities of the Plain destroyed! Lot is sent forth out of the overthrow. Darkness that might be felt enveloped the Egyptians; but the Israelites had light in all their dwellings. When the executioners were approaching Jerusalem, Set a mark, said God, upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for the abominations that are done in the midst of the land. Some of his servants are taken away from the evil to come. Pious connexions removed by death, are often spared the sight of relative troubles, under which perhaps they would have sunk. Many a pious youth, like Abijah, has come to an early grave in peace, and been housed from after-storms. The heathens said, They whom the gods love, die young. How often has he spared us; spared our lives, our senses, our limbs, our substance, our relations and friends; with regard to all of which, we must gratefully acknowledge, It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.

Secondly. He spares them as to correction. As his word tells us, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son;" *He* will not himself refuse to strike, when it is needful. Whom the Lord loveth, he therefore chasteneth—But how? What is the prayer of his people? O Lord, correct me, but with judgment: not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. And he hears them; and spares them as to the degree of the affliction. "In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind." They are afflicted; but they have alleviations. It might have been much worse. Others are more distressed. One comfort is gone; but many remain. Cast down, but not destroyed. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." For the same holds with regard to continuance; he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." See an instance of this sparing goodness expressed with incomparable tenderness, with regard to Ephraim: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Thirdly. He spares them as to exertion. He considers their strength, and will not require of some, what he ordains for others. A father, in his family, would not impose upon an infant, the service he would lay upon a young man. To some, in Thyatira, the Lord said, I will put upon you none other burden. The children are tender, says Jacob: and the flocks and herds with young are with me; and if men should over-drive them one day, all the flock would die. How much does this remind us of another, of whom it is said, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." When our Saviour was blamed for not enjoining fastings on his disciples, he replied; "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." There is, says Henry, in well-doing, an over-doing; and such overdoing, as may prove undoing. Many religious people are blameable here. They expect too much to be given up before persons have realized the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They want to effect every thing at a stroke They forget their own ignorance and slowness when God began to deal with them—They forget Him who does not despise the day of small things. They forget him who said to his followers, I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.

Fourthly. He spares them as to accept-

ance. Their best actions are imperfect. Their holiest duties are defiled. Their obedience needs pardon. To whom does not this apply! Nehemiah had done much for the cause of God: but does he appeal to justice, to reward him? No; but to mercy, to forgive him: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." Paul, after extolling Onesiphorus so highly, prays that even he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. I am looking, says the great John Howe dying, for eternal life; not as a profitable servant, but as a pardoned sinner. Where is the Christian, however distinguished his attainments, who, even in looking over his Sabbaths, and his communions at the Lord's table, and every alms-deed he ever performed, is not constrained to pray, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified?" —Well; he will spare you, as to your deficiencies in duty. He takes the design. He regards the motive. He looketh at the heart. He will pardon what is yours; and reward what is his own. He views you and your services through the mediation of his dear Son, in whom he is well pleased. Ah! *he spared not him that he might spare you.* If we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. And as God said to Job's friends, so he says to us—"My servant shall pray for you, and him will I accept; lest I deal with you according to your folly."

Never forget the goodness and kindness of God. He is your father—and he will spare you—

But spare not yourselves. Mind no labour. Regard no expense in his cause. Deny yourselves. Take up your cross, and follow him fully—follow him whithersoever he goeth.

OCTOBER 14.

"*According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.*"—Hosea xiii. 6.

In this and the former verse, God places Israel before us in two situations and conditions—The Wilderness, and Canaan. He reminds us of his knowledge of them in the former; and of their disregarding him in the latter. He commended them in their low estate; but had to complain of them in their prosperity—"I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." But, delivered from the privations and hardships of the desert, they entered the Land of Promise: the glory of all lands; a land of wheat and barley; a land of vineyards, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land wherein there was no scarceness; a land flowing with milk and honey. And what was the consequence?

First. Selfish indulgence—"*According* to their pasture, *so* were they *filled.*" And was this sinful! We plead for no monkish austerities. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." But the enjoyment of Christians differs from the excess of the sensual. We are not to feast ourselves without fear. We are not to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. We are not to throw the reins on the neck of appetite; and feed ourselves to the full. The mistake of many is, that they suppose every thing is their own; whereas nothing is their own. They are only stewards of the manifold grace of God. They think they may sleep as much as they like; dress as much as they like; consume as much as they like; but the Scripture is our rule, and not our own inclination. There is the cause of God, and of the poor, to be thought of, as well as our own gratification. The first lesson in the school of Christ is self-denial—Where, in the lives of some, does this ever appear? Temperance is one of the graces of the Spirit—And does this consist only in avoiding the grossness of drunkenness and gluttony? No; but in not "*filling* ourselves *according* to our pasture."

Secondly. Pride—"They were filled, and their *heart was exalted.*" This was the case even with Hezekiah: even *he* rendered not according to the benefits done him; for "his heart was lifted up." And, by charging them that are rich in this world not to be "high-minded," nor to "trust in uncertain riches," the Apostle shows the tendency there always is in worldly success to gender vanity and false confidence. Hence it is said, "Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment." They even think more highly of their understanding—as if their wisdom grew with their wealth. They speak with authority; and answer roughly.

Thirdly. Unmindfulness of God—"Therefore have they forgotten me." And how common is it for men, in the midst of their sufficiency, to lose the sense of their obligations to God, and dependence upon him, and need of him. Hence Agar prayed against being rich; "lest I should be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Hence the caution of the Jews, at their taking possession of all the good things in Canaan: "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." The admonition was unavailable. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.'

This gives us a very humbling view of human nature. Is it possible for us to consider it as so innocent, so amiable, so noble, as some would represent it to be! View it, not as it appears in the dregs of society; but as it is seen in common and reputable life. See men able to bear nothing without abuse—evil, because God is good—drawn from him, by the very things which should lead to him—ungrateful, in proportion as they should love and praise him—and even converting his gifts into weapons of rebellion against him! Lord, what is man!

Let the fact arouse us to caution and circumspection, if Providence smiles upon us, and we are placed in easy and agreeable circumstances. Yea, let us not only watch, but pray, lest we enter into temptation. Let us seek that grace which can alone enable us to manage a full estate properly, so as to elude its snares, and discharge its duties. *Then* we shall see, that what is impossible to men, is possible to God. It was said of Vespasian, that he was even the better man for being an emperor. So there are some, whose prosperity, instead of destroying them, displays and increases their excellency; and they are not only rich in temporal things, but rich in faith, and rich in good works. These instances, however, are rare.

The perils of the condition should check our eagerness after worldly affluence and ease. Why do we envy those that rise? Because we attach an undue value and importance to their acquisitions. Yet these possessions are not only transient; but unsatisfying; and vexatious; and corrupting. Yet, regardless of the testimony of Scripture, and all history and experience, how many, and even professors of religion, crave and pursue them as if they were the supreme good. But seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not. Bring your mind to your condition; for you never will be able to bring your condition to your mind. Your desires will enlarge with your indulgence; as fuel adds to the fierceness of the flame—Therefore let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Learn also resignation under afflictive dispensations, either in crossing your schemes, or in reducing your resources. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." It was said of Moab, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." The Prodigal was more favoured—a famine drove him home. Manasseh was mercifully ruined—in his affliction he sought the Lord God of his father, and he was found of him. And he gives you the valley of Achor for a door of hope. Do not think hardly of Him, under whose discipline you now are. He knew your danger; and interposed to prevent it. He has hedged up your way with thorns; but it is to keep you from following lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercies. He tries you; but it is for your profit. He sees what you can bear. And He who loved you, so as to give his own Son for you, will suffer you to want no good thing.

OCTOBER 15.

"*And the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.*"—Deut. v. 28.

Thus he expressly mentions his having *heard* what they had *said* to Moses. It is equally true that he hears all we say; and has heard all we have ever said. This is a solemn thought; especially as he has heard all our words, not as an unconcerned auditor, but as a witness and a judge. How many of them have we forgotten! But they are all in the book of his remembrance. "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Here, the words which God had heard, were the words of religious avowal—"Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and *we will hear it, and do it.*" And he has heard all our religious resolutions and engagements. First. Our more private ones; when we have been impressed alone—with regard to such a temper, that we would watch against it—with regard to such a temptation, that we would pray for grace to resist it—with regard to our time, that we would redeem it—with regard to our substance, that we would honour the Lord with it. And, secondly, with regard to our more public and solemn ones: when we joined ourselves to his people; and went to his table; and, over the memorials of dying love, said, "Henceforth by Thee only will I make mention of thy Name—

> 'Here, in thy house, I leave my vow,
> And thy rich grace record;
> Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
> If I forsake the Lord.'"

I have heard, says he, the voice of the words of this people. And adds, with approbation, containing in it complaint—"They have well *said* all that they have *spoken*." But talking and doing are two things. Even with regard to ourselves, one of them goes a very little way without the other—Yea, it rather offends—it adds insult to injury. We scorn a flattering profession, contradicted by actions—Actions, we say, speak louder than

words. What is lip-service in religion! Judas gave our Lord the lip—called him Master—and kissed him—and betrayed. Ezekiel's hearers extolled his preaching, and brought others to admire him: but their hearts went after their covetousness—They heard his words, but did them not. So David testifies of these Jews—"When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and inquired early after God—Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." And so here. They spoke well in expressing their readiness to hear and to do. But God, who knew them better than they knew themselves, immediately exclaimed—"O that there was such a heart in them!"

—Speech is one of the most uncertain criterions by which we can judge of character, either as to the reality or degree of religion. From education, reading, and hearing, persons may easily learn to talk well. They may even surpass others, who are far better than themselves: as an empty vessel, when touched, sounds louder than a full one; and as a shallow brook is more noisy than a deep river. Some speak little, especially concerning themselves, from a fear of deception; and a concern, lest they should appear to others above what they really are. Baxter, in his life of Judge Hale, says, For a time, I feared he was wanting in experimental religion, as he seldom spoke of his own spiritual views and feelings. But upon better acquaintance, I found I was mistaken. He had heard, from many in his times, so much hypocrisy and fanaticism, that he was urged towards the extreme of silence. And it is the better extreme of the two. Christians feed on the hidden manna: and have a white stone, with a new name in it, which no one readeth save he that receiveth it. Would it not be better for some to talk less of their high confidence, and their wonderful ecstacies, before those who are weak in faith and comfort? and who are in danger of being depressed by comparison? How assuredly do some speak of the time when they were "enlightened," or "converted;" as if they could ascertain the period of the second birth, as exactly as that of the first! Might it not, sometimes at least, be better to speak of the fact with less decision? and always to consider the work, not so much done as doing! or to pray that it might be done! So did David—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

To how many individuals will the words before us apply? Here is a champion for the truth. He has defended its purity and importance. He has contended earnestly, and, as far as argument or evidence goes, wisely, for the faith once delivered to the saints. He has well *said* all that he has *spoken*. But where is the Spirit of Truth? the meekness of wisdom! the mind of Christ! Every page of controversy ought to have at the top, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" and at the bottom, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Another has entered the sanctuary of God, and, in language equally beautiful and true, has acknowledged, We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep—we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts—there is no health in us. And he has well *said* all that he has *spoken*. But where is the broken heart, and the contrite spirit? How often, after these confessions, is the sermon, founded upon them, disliked, and the preacher of it condemned! Here is a third. He has gone to his brethren in distress, and justified the ways of God to man. But does he justify God's dealings with himself in trouble? He has well *said* all that he has *spoken*—But he reminds us of the language of Eliphaz to Job—"Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy works have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

Men may mistake themselves, when they do not mean to deceive others. They are often, at the time, as sincere as they are earnest. The young; the afflicted in the hour of distress; the sick, and the dying; express many things which are as true as they are good, according to their *present* feelings. But they do not distinguish between impulse and disposition; between outward excitement and inward principle. Hazael, at the prediction of his cruelties, ignorant of the change that power would produce in him, really execrated the character he became. Peter was presuming, but not false, when he said, Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. The disciples supposed themselves established in the faith, beyond the danger of temptation to forsake him, when they said, "Now we believe." But Jesus answered them—O that there was such a heart in you!—"Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

OCTOBER 16.

"*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*"—John xxi. 25.

THIS is the language of the writer of this Gospel, in concluding his narrative. After

all that he had brought forward, much more remained behind. He had composed a memoir, rather than a history: and only furnished a few specimens of a subject, boundless in itself.

Yet the expression he employs in asserting this may seem to many surprising, if not confounding. There are two ways of solving the difficulty.

First. The language is a figure; a strong hyperbole. This was very common in the East. Indeed, it is frequent with writers and speakers in all countries. Even in our familiar discourse we often, without being aware of it, express ourselves as remotely from truth, if *absolutely* considered—"I am tired to death." "I have no strength left." "Every body knows it." Such a thing is—"provided at the shortest notice"—which would be a moment. But no deception is intended: and no danger of mistake follows.

Yet, secondly, though this meets the difficulty, some have also a little altered the rendering, and read—not, the world would not *contain;* but would not *receive*, the books that would be written. So Doddridge and others. This is allowable in criticism: but let us observe the justness of the inference. If all the particulars of his birth and infancy, and youth, and manhood; if all the occurrences of his private and public life; if all his actions, his miracles, his speeches, his prayers, with all their relative circumstances; if all these had been recorded—instead of a book, we must have had books; and books so—large, and—many, that the design must have been counteracted. For then—there were no books but were in manuscript. And who would have had leisure to transcribe them? Who would have taken the trouble?—If they were purchased from transcribers, who would have endured the expense! They could only have been the property of the very rich—And when they had become their own, who could have had time to read them? Who could have remembered them all? How multiplied would have been the difficulties requiring explanation! All these would have been, with men, reasons or excuses for not procuring; or not perusing; or not understanding them.

Therefore each of the inspired lives of our Saviour himself, is not so long as many a sermon. The four put together are far shorter than the published account of many a modern, insignificant character. But let us not complain, or lament, that the whole is so compendious and brief. It is not a defect, but an excellency. The wisdom and goodness of God appear in it. It meets the more, our situations; engagements; and capacities. More would only have perplexed us, or multiplied our diversions.

And let us remember also, that we do not want the aid of traditional supplement, or human additions, to the Scriptures of truth. Though short, they are sufficient. They leave nothing obscure as to our duty, or welfare—They are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

And may we not suppose that it will be a part of our engagement and blessedness in heaven to derive from those acquainted with them, or from the Saviour himself, the knowledge of a thousand things concerning his eventful history, of which we are now ignorant?

Above all, let us rejoice in what has been furnished. Let us rejoice that it is so divinely proved—and that it has been preserved uncorrupted down to our own time—and that we have it in our own language—and are allowed—and able to read it. And let us keep the *end* of the whole in view, and never be satisfied till it be accomplished in our experience. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name."

OCTOBER 17.

"*It is high time to awake out of sleep.*"
Rom. xiii. 11.

These words regard Christians themselves. This is undeniable, from the motive subjoined: "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Are *believers*, then, asleep? Not in the sense they once were—this would be impossible. But there are found, even in *them*, some remains of their former depravity. Though the good work is begun in them, it is far from being accomplished. While the bridegroom tarried, even the wise virgins slumbered and slept. Yes, Christians, alas! are often in a drowsy state; and oftener in a drowsy frame. This is sadly reproachful. What! drowsy, in examining themselves whether they be in the faith! Drowsy, in praising the God of their salvation! Drowsy, in seeking mercy and grace to help them in time of need! Drowsy, in serving their generation by the will of God? Are they not the disciples of Jesus? Did he ever speak an idle word? Did he ever lose a useful moment? "I must work," said he, "the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work."

Yet, if the address be proper for Christians, how much more necessary is it for those who are entirely regardless of the things that belong to their peace! Surely, for *them* "it is high time to awake out of sleep"—

—If we consider how long they have been sleeping. We ought to lament that we have

lost *any* of our precious hours and opportunities. However short it may have been, the time past of our life should more than suffice, wherein we have lived to the will of man. What, then, should those feel who have sacrificed the whole of their youth? Perhaps the vigour of mature age? What should those feel, who, perhaps, have grown gray in the service of sin and the world? The later we begin, the more zealous should we be to redeem the advantages we have lost; and to overtake those who were wise enough to set off early. When Cæsar, in Spain, met with a statue of Alexander, he wept at the thought, that this illustrious conqueror had achieved so much before *he* had even begun his career. High time,

—If we consider that the day is arrived, and the sun is risen so high. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." We can say more than the Apostle. The night *is* spent. The day is *fully come*. And we are all the children of the light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness—*Therefore* let us not sleep as do others. They that sleep, sleep in the night. Look into Nature. The sun ariseth, and man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. The sun shines, not for us to sleep, but discharge the duties of our stations by its lustre. And why is the Gospel given us? Why is our duty so plainly made known, but that we may follow it? And why are the blessings of divine grace so clearly set before us, but that we may seek them? Our obligations always increase with our advantages. To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. And the servant that knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes; for where much is given, much will be required. High time,

—If we consider the business they have to do. I am doing, said Nehemiah to some who would have interrupted him—I cannot come down to you: I am doing a great work. How much more may a Christian say this! He has an enterprize connected with the soul! and God! and eternity! Some things are desirable, and some are useful; but this is absolutely indispensable—

> "Sufficient in itself alone;
> And needful, were the world our own."

Neglect, in many a concern, is injurious: but here it is ruinous—ruinous of every thing—and ruinous for ever. High time,

—If we consider the nature of the season in which this difficult and all-important work is to be accomplished. It is short: and there is but a step between us and death. It is uncertain in its continuance; and may be terminated every moment, by some of those numberless dangers, internal and external, to which we are exposed. And, once gone, it can never be renewed. No place will be found for repentance, though we seek it carefully with tears. High time,

—If we consider the danger they are in. If a man was sleeping in a house, and the fire was seen, not only to be kindled, but raging over his apartment; or approaching rapidly his door; or ready to catch the very curtains of his bed; who would not think it high time for him to awake, and escape for his life? This is but a weak representation of the danger of sinners. They are condemned already. The wrath of God abideth on them. They are nigh unto cursing. Their end is to be burned. Their destruction is not only insured, but begun. And we are required to save with fear, pulling them out of the fire. High time to awake out of sleep,

—If we consider that all besides are awake. God is awake—Angels are awake—Glorified saints are awake—Brutes are awake—The children of this generation are awake—Devils are awake—Death is awake—Damnation is awake—Their damnation slumbereth not.—It is high time to awake out of sleep!

Is it not too late? Have I not reason to fear, that I have passed the bounds of Divine patience? that the Lord hath shut to the door? that, in resentment of my neglects and provocations, he hath given me over to a reprobate mind? that he hath poured upon me the spirit of slumber?—And hence it is that I hear so often with indifference, and that nothing affects me now as it once did!

But may I not hope, that his longsuffering will yet be my salvation? that he has spared me so long to afford space for repentance? that the seriousness of this retirement is another call of mercy? that the uneasiness, the dread, the desire I now feel, are a token for good?—that the lingering of pity still cries, How shall I give thee up?—Lord, save—I perish!

OCTOBER 18.

"*He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.*" Psalm lxxxv. 8.

How encouraging is this *expectation!*—"He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints."

Mark the blessing itself—*Peace.* It does not mean outward ease and prosperity. He nowhere engages to speak this: but spiritual comfort; the composure of the conscience; the satisfaction of the heart; by which the "*soul* shall dwell at ease:" the effect of confidence in God: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee,

because he trusteth in thee." How relieving is it, under a sense of guilt, to believe in the blood that cleanseth from all sin! How soothing is it, in the various changes of life, to be assured that all things shall work together for our good! How confirming is it, in the prospect of every duty, to know that his strength shall be made perfect in weakness! This is the rest wherewith we are to cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.

Observe the author of the communication —*He* will speak peace. And unless *He* speaks it, it will be spoken in vain. Friends may address us—but they will be found miserable comforters. Ministers may attempt to bind up the broken heart—but they will prove physicians of no value. Ordinances may be regarded—but they will be wells without water, and clouds without rain. But "when He giveth quietness, then who can make trouble?"—We can only implore, or announce peace: but his word produces, conveys it. He commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. Nothing is beyond the reach of Him who turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

Observe the heirs of the privilege—He will speak peace to his *people*, and to his *saints*. These are not different characters, but different representations of the same persons: and the one is explanatory of the other. He has a people for his name: and if we ask, who they are, we are told they are saints; that is, they are holy ones. They are not perfectly holy: but they are really so. The principles of sanctification, of which they are the partakers, will soon gain the entire possession of them; but even now they have the ascendency in them. Their love of holiness is evinced, even with regard to their remaining corruptions. These are their burden and distress: and for these, they abhor themselves. They long, above all things, to walk so as to please God; and constantly pray, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.—And what have others to do with peace?" "There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked."

Mark also the certainty of the assurance —He *will* speak peace unto his people, and to his saints. Every thing tends to confirm it. His name—He is the God of peace. His thoughts—they are thoughts of peace. The mediation of the Son of his love—He made peace by the blood of his Cross. His dealings with us—Had he a mind to kill us, he would not have shown us such things as these. The truth of his Word—The Scripture cannot be broken.

And how reasonable is the *caution*—"But let them not turn again unto folly."

—Here we see the character of sin: it is folly. Such the God of truth pronounces it to be now. Such every transgressor will acknowledge it to be at last. Should not this be enough to deter us from it—that it perfectly befools us! and will fill us with everlasting shame and contempt!

—Here we are reminded that the people of God, though saints now, were once chargeable with it—The command not to *turn again* to folly proves this. Their being *made to differ*, supposes former sameness. They were by nature children of wrath, even as others: and they are willing to own it: and often look to the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged.

—We are also taught that they are still in danger; and need warning. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall We are always exposed to a subtle and invisible enemy: we live in a wicked world; and carry within us an evil heart. The best, in an hour of temptation, have turned again to folly.

—But against this we should feel ourselves peculiarly concerned to guard, *when* God has appeared for us, and spoken peace to our souls. Were we not, we should be alike ungrateful and infatuated. *Ungrateful;* for the more He does for us, the more anxious should we be, lest we offend and grieve his Holy Spirit. *Infatuated;* for having known the evil of sin, and the bitterness of repentance, and the joy of God's salvation; shall we again cause him to hide his face from us? and wrong our own souls? For the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.

OCTOBER 19.

"*Seeing many things, but thou observest not.*"
Isaiah xlii. 20.

THIS charge is as applicable to us, as it was to the Jews. Nothing is more common than the want of wise and proper *observation.* The objects and events adapted to excite it, and which would also reward it, are various and numberless. And some of them daily and hourly strike our senses; yet they engage none of our notice and attention, as rational and moral beings. From an immense multitude, let us select two of these occurrences, by way of example—The birth, and the death, of our fellow-creatures.

How little attention is excited by the birth of a child. It may perhaps, if it takes place in respectable life, be announced in the paper —inquiries may be made concerning its sex and form—it may be viewed and embraced by the friends who call ceremoniously on the mother who has been delivered. But what moral or religious reflection is ever indulged by those who are informed of the event! or even by the parents themselves? The interesting sufferer herself may be pleased with the congratulations paid her; and forget her anguish

for joy that a man is born into the world; and feel a lively gratitude for the mercy she has experienced: but no one thought may arise in the mind respecting the all-important result, in the production of a new being—and such a being too!—Yet the birth of a child can scarcely be deemed less than a miracle of Nature and Providence. That child is a piece of Divine workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made; and as fearfully and wonderfully preserved and endowed. When the Creator made it, he did a far greater thing than when he made the sun. The sun is a mass of unintelligent matter. It sees not its own light. It feels not its own heat; and is not destined to shine and burn for ever. But there is a spirit in that child; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. He is a moral being. He is the subject of reason and conscience. These principles are not yet developed; but they are lodged in him. They are in him, as the flower is in the seed; and the oak in the acorn. He is an heir of immortality; and though his existence began yesterday, it will never, never end. He will hear the heavens pass away with a great noise, and see the elements melt with fervent heat. He will stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; and go away into everlasting punishment, or into life eternal.

He is also to be viewed relatively, as well as personally. And what an awful interest does he acquire from the evil he may occasion, as well as suffer! and from the good he may produce, as well as experience! He may prove a viper in the bosom that feeds him; a disgrace to his family; a curse to the nation. Many may be vitiated by his example, and led into hell by his influence. One sinner destroyeth much good. Or he may make a glad father; and prove a blessing to the neighbourhood; and serve his generation by the will of God; and levy a tax of gratitude on future ages. Who that had seen Isaac Watts in the arms of his mother, sitting at the door of the prison in which his father was suffering for conscience' sake, could have divined that this precious babe was the sweet Psalmist of the Christian Israel; and that the little hand that stroked her cheek, was ordained to hold the pen that should instruct and edify the world to the end of time! Had we heard when the babe wept, and looked into the ark of bulrushes, we should have seen the scholar, learned in all the wisdom of Egypt; the scourge of Pharaoh; the deliverer of the Hebrews; the king in Jeshurun; the lawgiver and the prophet of the Lord, with whom he spake face to face. What says the Lord of all? "Despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my heavenly Father."

Let us pass to the second article—Death. This is perpetually taking place around us: yet how little it is noticed was long ago remarked by Eliphaz: "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever, without any regarding it." This indifference is one of the most astonishing things in a world of wonders; especially when taken in connexion with those consequences, that, in general belief, are supposed to result from it. If a tower fell; if a mountain was swallowed up by an earthquake; we should notice, and make it the subject of conversation for days and weeks—Yet, what is this compared with the removal of a fellow-creature; detached from all union with visible nature; excluded from every thing that once pleased or engaged him below the sun; severed from all his endeared connexions; his flesh seeing corruption; while his soul has entered into an entirely new state of existence, in immediate and perceptible communion with the Lord of all! Death is the most serious and momentous event that can befall the children of men. For it is not the extinction of being, but only the termination of one mode of it, and the commencement of another: the transition from time to eternity; from a course of action to the sentence of retribution. When the dust returns to the dust, whence it was, the spirit returns to God, who gave it: and then the Divine fiat runs, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

And yet who considers it? When the bell tolls we hardly ask whose doom it announces. When we see a funeral in the street we scarcely look towards it, unless it be accompanied with pomp of mortality. We see new names on the doors of the houses; but we pass without thinking that the places which once knew the owners know them no more for ever. A neighbour dies, and, from civility, we attend the burial, and lend him our last assistance; but return into the busy or trifling concerns of life as careless as before. Death enters our own dwelling—we feel deeply; but we reflect slightly. We mourn our loss; but the heart is not made better: we miss them for a time; but we soon furnish substitutes, or grow insensible to the want of them. When every duty the utmost decorum can exact, or the most perfect affection dictates, is discharged towards the deceased; where is the concern of the living to derive from the decease itself the spiritual profit which it is designed to yield? Where is the earnestness of the prayer, "*So* teach us to number our days, that we may apply our heart unto wisdom?"

Every death; the death of the young, and the death of the old; the death of the rich, and the death of the poor; the death of the

saint, and the death of the sinner; has something, not only serious, but appropriate, to impart. But to the generality of mankind, each of them says nothing—or speaks in vain.

Much of this disregard is from the frequency of the occurrence. Nothing seems to affect us strongly, but what is sudden or rare. The most important object, and the most interesting events, when they become familiar, awaken neither wonder nor attention. Yet, if we cannot regulate our impressions, we can govern our ideas; we can apply our thoughts to any subject we please: and we should not suffer what is so full of instruction to pass without just reflection. We cannot be always thinking of death; but we should never be so absent from a proper condition of mind as not to be easily recalled to the improvement of an event which must soon happen to all; and for which we may prepare, though we cannot prevent.

It is not only the commonness of the subject, but our aversion to it, that keeps us from attending to it. It is, above all things, irksome to flesh and blood: we, therefore, are always endeavouring to put the evil day far away. But since we cannot put it off; let us pray for that *grace* which will turn the enemy into a friend, and the curse into a blessing. Then to die will be gain: and we may live rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

"If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

OCTOBER 20.

"*Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty.*" Isaiah xxxiii. 17.

WHAT was the sight of Hezekiah, released from his affliction, and appearing cheerfully in his royal robes to his subjects, after the destruction of the Assyrian army; compared with another sight! "We see Jesus, who, for the suffering of death, was crowned with glory and honour." Some, in the days of his flesh, with their bodily eyes, beheld his glory. And perhaps we are ready to envy them the privilege. But this sight of him was not accompanied with salvation—"Ye also," said he, "have seen me, and believed not:" and to those who were then before him he complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."

On the other hand, there is a substitute for this sight of him; and it is infinitely more available—And he is the subject of it, who sees him, not with the eye of the body, but with the eye of the mind; not with the eye of sense, but with the eye of faith—"He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life." There is a spiritual perception of him, as much distinguished from common knowledge as the taste of a thing is from the report of it. Thus the Apostle says, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me, and, speaking of all Christians, as well as of himself, he adds, "He hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This sight of the Saviour will be evinced by certain effects. Self will be lowered. What can he think of his own excellences who has been at the court above, and seen the king in his beauty! Self-admiration and self-dependence will then be at an end. "The proud looks shall be humbled, and the lofty looks shall be laid low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." So it was with Job—"Now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, repenting in dust and ashes." So it was with Isaiah—"Wo is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." The world will fade away, and lose its charms. The Sun of righteousness will shine it out; as the luminaries of the night disappear in the effulgence of day. Attachment will result from it. Love enters by the eye. And faith is the same to the soul as this sense is to the body: therefore, to them "that believe, he is precious." He "dwells in the heart by faith." There will also necessarily arise a desire after more acquaintance and intercourse with him. Thus Paul, not because he was ignorant of him, but because he knew him, said, "That I may know him." There will also be an earnest desire to recommend him to others. As soon as Andrew knew him, he found his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus. So did Philip his friend Nathanael. And so did the woman of Samaria her fellow-citizens.

This sight of him is a very distinguished privilege. As it is said of his immediate followers, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord;" so we believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. There is enough in him, perceptible to the view of faith, to induce us to rejoice in the Lord *always*. But how delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *conviction?* A drowning man, seeing a deliverer in a boat, hastening to his assistance: a debtor, on his way to prison, seeing a surety at hand to undertake for him: a man, dying of hunger, seeing the most delicious food—never saw what I saw, when, sensible of my state and danger, and feeling myself ready to perish, my heart revived at the view of such a Saviour, in his suitableness to my condition, in his all-sufficiency for my relief—and I was enabled to hope in his mercy.

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *desertion!* If he withdraws from me, it is not to show his sovereignty, but to correct for sin: and when he hides his face I am troubled. Then creatures are all mi-

serable comforters. Then I sigh, O that it was with me as in months past! Then I pray, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation—But when he appears and smiles again, it is more than the joy of morning, after a darksome night; or of spring, after the dreariness of winter.

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *trouble!* It is then, when our purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of our hearts; when enemies oppose; when friends fail or betray; when health declines —It is then we look towards him who is the consolation of Israel, and say, "This same shall comfort us:" "This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land."

How delightful is the sight of him in the hour of *death!* It loosened Simon from all below, and made him more than willing to depart; wishing, now he had seen him, to defile, to vex his eyes with nothing else. And how many have since said,

> "Jesus, the vision of thy face
> Hath overpowering charms:
> Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
> If Christ be in my arms."

Such are the influence and the blessedness of a sight of him, by faith, here. What then is heaven? "His servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face." "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory." How superior will that sight be to all our present apprehensions of him! It will be clear. It will be ceaseless. It will be uninterrupted. It will be perfect. It will be immediate. Whatever we have read or heard of him before, we shall then exclaim, with the Queen of Sheba, at the sight of Solomon, "The half was not told me!"

> "'Tis pleasant to believe thy grace,
> But we would rather *see;*
> We would be absent from the flesh,
> And present, Lord, with thee."

OCTOBER 21.

"*O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!*" Deut. v. 29.

Here we see the character of real religion. The seat of it is the *heart*—The principle of it is the *fear of God*—The expression of it is *keeping* his *commandments; all* of them; and *always.*

We have also the benefit resulting from it. The good is personal—that it might be well with *them.* And relative—and with their *children.* And durable—for *ever.*

But how lovely does God appear in the concern he here expresses! "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"—It is the language of complaint. It is as much as to say, "But I do not find it so." Is he then disappointed! Not as to fact, for he knows all things. But he is as to right. Surely he may justly expect from us an attention to his voice, and the improvement of the means and advantages with which we are favoured. And when he meets with nothing of this, he has reason to complain—And this is his meaning, when he says, "What more could have been done for my vineyard, and I have not done it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" "These three years I came seeking fruit, and finding none."

It is the expression of desire. We are aware that when the Scripture ascribes human attributes and feelings to God, they must be understood according to the perfection of his nature. They cannot mean precisely the same in him as they do in us. Yet there is always a *truth* which is the basis of all such metaphorical representations. And a slavish adherence to systematic divinity has much injured some of the finest passages of Revelation; and which were intended to be felt rather than criticised. Let it not therefore be objected, that "our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he pleaseth;" and asked, "Who hath resisted his will?"—This is his own language, "O that there was such a heart in them!" "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments; then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea!" "How often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Yes, these are his own words—the expressions of a God that cannot lie. This affords me every encouragement I want. Unworthy as I am, I see that he does not abandon me. He is willing to save me. He is waiting to be gracious. He is exalted to have mercy upon me. What is the inability of men to harmonize such declarations with some other parts of their creed, to the oath of the living God!—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth: wherefore turn and live ye."

It is the dictate of parental solicitude. It is the voice, not of a severe legislator or judge, but of a Father; a Father who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; a Father who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; a Father who says, of the refractory child, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel! how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together;" a Father who says of the relenting, self-be-

moaning child, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." How often does he assume this relation, in order to deprive his greatness of terror; and to render it our encouragement and our confidence! And not only has he said, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him:" but he has taken for an image of his tenderness the heart of a mother—and surely all that is parental indwells there: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may." Ah! ye mothers, your affection is ice, your heart is iron compared with his —"yet will I not forget thee."

Surely "he that loveth not, knoweth not God—for God is love." *Can* this encourage us to sin? *Can* we grieve *his* Holy Spirit? *Can* we hear *him* saying in *vain*, "O do not that abominable thing which I hate?" "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance: but, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

OCTOBER 22.

"*I am come that they might have life.*"
John x. 10.

Though men have differed in their definitions of life, they have all agreed in their estimation of it. Even the father of lies spake truth, when he said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. Yet what is this life which we so highly prize? nourish with so much care? and to preserve which, we are ready to make every kind of sacrifice? What is it in duration? "A vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." What is it in dignity? "We spend our years as a tale that is told." What is it in enjoyment? Hear Jacob—"Few, and full of evil, have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage." "But his was, perhaps, a peculiar case." What says Job? "*Man* that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." "But he expressed himself under depression and gloom." What then says Solomon, who withheld his heart from no joy? "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." But here is a life that deserves the name: a life, spiritual in its nature; endless in its continuance; consisting, not of an immortality of being only, but of blessedness; commencing in grace; completed in glory; and emphatically called, The Life of God. Of this life the Lord Jesus here speaks—"I am come that they might have life."

He came to *procure it for us.* The blessing comes every way free to us; but it cost him dear. If we live, he must die. "The bread," said he, "which I give, is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." Princes have often sacrificed the lives of their subjects to their own: yea, and where their own have not been in danger, they have offered thousands of victims on the altar of their vanity or revenge. But the Prince of Peace gave his life a ransom for many. He was poor. He was a man of sorrows. You see him agonizing in the garden; and hear him exclaiming on the cross, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Why is all this? Is he guilty? "In him was no sin." Yet he was esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But "he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." "One died for all."

He came *to announce it to us.* We can derive no benefit from him without a dependence upon him; an application to him; a connexion with him. But all this requires the knowledge of him: and therefore says God, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." It is true we are justified by faith—but "how can we believe in him of whom we have not heard? and how can we hear without a preacher? He therefore "came and preached peace." "I am come," said he, "a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." He proclaimed the nature of this life; the source of it; the medium of it; the certainty of it; the present enjoyment of it. His disciples, therefore, well said, To whom should we go, but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life. And these words he dispensed, not only by his personal ministry, but by the instrumentality of others. What the Apostles did, *he* did; because he sent them, and qualified them: he inspired them, and commanded them to preach the Gospel to every creature, and also to record it, for the use of all future ages; so that we can read what they delivered.

He came to *produce it in us.* "The Son quickeneth whom he will." He received, in consequence of his death, the whole dispensation of the Holy Ghost; and hence it is called, "The Spirit of Christ." And this Spirit is, as the Apostle calls it, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death. Nothing less than this can insure the result. It is above the efficiency of education; of example; of moral suasion; and of all the means of grace—with

out the grace of the means. The Gospel cannot accomplish it, if it comes in word only —It is the Spirit that giveth life. The servant of the Lord is like Gehazi. He went and laid the staff upon the child, but no life appeared till his master himself came. Who then is Paul? and who is Apollos? but ministers *by* whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? And they who were once dead in trespasses and sins, but are now walking in newness of life, will acknowledge that *he* quickened them; and will readily give him the glory that is due to his holy Name.

In this blessed business, therefore, he is all in all. He came that we might have life—Came to procure it for us as our Priest—To announce it, as our Prophet—To produce it, as our King. To obtain it, by his blood—To publish it, by his Gospel. To bestow it, by his Spirit. He is therefore called, this life itself in the abstract—When he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.

But how many neglect him, and compel him to complain, Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life! Hence the heinousness of their guilt, and the dreadfulness of their condemnation. Whatever difficulties attend this truth, in connexion with any other; they attach only to the explanation; not to the fact itself. Nothing can be clearer, from the Scripture, than that they who thus perish, will destroy themselves; and be treated as spiritual suicides.

But if we desire this life, can we suppose the Saviour will refuse us, when we go to him for the very purpose for which he came? Did he ever refuse any? Can he refuse any? He cannot—He has bound himself—"HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME, I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT."

OCTOBER 23.

"*And that they might have it more abundantly.*"—John x. 10.

THUS he not only informs us of the design of his advent: "I am come that they might have life;" but, like himself, adds the extensiveness of it—"and that they might have it more abundantly." This may be exemplified in three comparisons.

We have life more abundantly than *Adam*. His life, before the Fall, was a noble life; but it is surpassed by the life of the Christian.—This is firmer as to its tenure. The life of innocency was precarious. It was suspended on the fallible will of man. The stock was in Adam's own hands; and he failed, and ruined all his posterity. But this life can never be destroyed. The Head of the New Covenant ever liveth; and because he lives, his people shall live also: I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.—It is richer as to its quality. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord, from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. It is not the primeval body of Adam which is to be the model in our resurrection, but the glorious body of the Saviour. We are to bear the image of the heavenly. Had Adam remained innocent, though he would never have died, yet must he have experienced a change before he could have been capable of enjoying the blessedness which the poorest Christian expects; for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. After a proper trial of his obedience, he would have been removed to a higher state; but even then he must have been a stranger to many interesting feelings and delightful enjoyments, arising from all the operations of divine grace in our recovery from the depths of the Fall to the glories of heaven. Eden was not equal to the Paradise above. The creation of man is excelled by his redemption. The righteousness of a perfect creature is far below the righteousness of God, in which we are not justified, but "exalted."

We have life more abundantly than the *Jewish Church*. They derive their life from the same source with us; and it was essentially the same with ours. But we have it more plenteously as to knowledge, liberty, and enjoyment. We are fully justified in considering our spiritual advantages as very superior to their privileges, by our Saviour himself, who said to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." They had the types and shadows; we have the very image of the thing. They saw the Messiah afar off, and under a veil; he is with us, and we behold him with open face. They had the first-fruits; we have the whole vintage. They had the dawn; we have the full day—God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. They, from their comparative darkness, were inspired with more disquiet and terror; they received the spirit of bondage to fear: we receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The way into the holiest was not then made manifest: the people never entered where God dwelt between the Cherubim: the High Priest only went in; and he only once a year. But we have all boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and may draw near in full assurance of faith. They came to a material mountain, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness and darkness, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard

entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. "But we are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

We have life more abundantly than we had it *ourselves before*. Vital religion, though imperfect, is growing and progressive. Under the influences of the Holy Spirit, we go from strength to strength in our course; and are renewed day by day in our experience. There is life in an acorn; but the oak has it more abundantly. There is wheat in the blade; but how much more in the full corn in the ear! What a difference between Sir Isaac Newton when a babe on his mother's knee, and a philosopher measuring the distances of the planets! "Why a man can but live." Indeed! Do you not sometimes say, I am all languor; I have no life in me! At other times you are all vigour and alacrity—How you live then! What a difference between a man confined in a hospital; and a man at large, able to fill and enjoy his station! A man may be alive, and be blind, and deaf, and lame, and able to eat nothing with a relish. Some real Christians are little better than this—they are—just alive! But they are to be suspected who are only anxious to know that they have the reality of divine grace, while they are regardless of increase in the divine life. More is desirable. More is attainable. He came not only that we might have life—but have it more *abundantly*.

Wherefore pray, "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

OCTOBER 24.

"*And I will give him the morning star.*"
Rev. ii. 28.

If we found any difficulty in determining the subject of this promise, we could refer to the speaker's own declaration in another part of this Book—"I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and the morning star." Here we see the advantage of comparing one passage of Scripture with another. What is general in one is particularized in another: and what is darker in one, is clearer in another.

Does he then promise *himself*—*I* will give him the morning star! Yes—He is the guide and the way; the teacher and the lesson: the priest and the sacrifice: the giver and the gift, He is all in all. By promising *himself*, he would teach us to look for happiness in himself, and not in the creature. He also knew that nothing else could satisfy the minds of his people, who would be sure to say,

"Without thy graces and thyself,
I were a wretch undone."

"Give what thou canst—without thee we are poor:
And, with thee, rich, take what thou wilt away."

And thus also he would encourage their expectations: for what will he withhold, if he gives himself? Therefore, because he could promise no greater, he promised himself. The bestowment of himself would have been greater than the bestowment of heaven: for heaven is, so to speak, but a part of him. He that buildeth the house hath more honour than the house.

But has he not already given himself to his people? And yet he speaks as if the donation was future—I *will* give him the morning star. Yes; as soon as they believed on him they received him, and had the privilege of becoming the sons of God. But as to their knowledge, experience, and enjoyment; he communicates himself to them by degrees. The apostle therefore says, after many years of communion with him, That I *may* win Christ, and be found in him; that I *may* know him. The promise *must* be principally accomplished hereafter. We *could* not receive him in all his fulness now. Our place, our condition, our powers forbid. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

But let me survey the image—I will give him the *morning star*. The morning star, to our view, is the most beautiful and luminous. It is distinguished by its sparkling brightness. Many resemble Christ; but in all things he has the pre-eminence. Prophets, priests, and kings, have been anointed, as well as he; but he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. O how great is his beauty! He is fairer than the children of men; fairer than the children of God, fairer than the sons of God who shouted for joy at the creation—Yea, he is altogether lovely.

But the thing is, that this luminary is the harbinger of day. Therefore it is called the day star; and the morning star. The truth of the image, therefore, is to assure us—that to those who believe on him, there is a glorious season drawing on. The night of ignorance, and error, and sin, and sorrow, with them is rapidly terminating—Weeping may endure for the night; but joy cometh in the morning. Look—Look, Christians! *There*

is the shining pledge. It never failed yet. It cannot deceive. Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The NIGHT is far spent. The day is at hand. And then your sun shall no more go down.

Let this promise place me, and keep me in a proper frame of mind. Let it raise me above the world. Let it teach me, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Let it induce me to rejoice evermore; yea, and in every thing to give thanks. To the upright there ariseth *light* in the darkness. If in the world I have tribulation in him, I have peace. Many things are denied me; but I can dispense with them, since he is mine. Why should I envy others? They succeed; they gain; they possess—But *I* have the morning star.

> "What others value, I resign;
> Lord, 'tis enough that *thou* art mine:
> I shall behold thy blissful face;
> And stand complete in righteousness!"

OCTOBER 25.

"*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*"—John x. 9.

A DOOR is a very familiar and striking representation of the Lord Jesus. It seems hardly necessary to remark, that it must be a metaphor. Yet the Papists, from taking literally, what is spoken in a similar instance, have introduced the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation. Because when he took the bread, and the wine, our Saviour said, "This *is* my body, and this *is* my blood!" they believe that the disciples received his real body and blood; and that every communicant does the same now, when the priest has consecrated the elements: and, say they, we only take him at his word—nothing can be plainer. Upon the same principle, we may say, he is timber and nails: for he says—what can be clearer! I am the door. But can any man of common sense—can a child suppose that he means any thing more than that a door is an image of him?

The design of the allusion is obvious. A door is the medium of passage—and Jesus stands between God and us. He is the mediator of the new covenant. God comes to us through him: and conveys all his blessings to us by him. And we approach God through him. I am the way, said he—No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. And as, with regard to our persons, we come unto God by him; so it is with regard to our services: we offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. And, with regard to both, we have boldness and access, with confidence, only by the faith of him.

But how is the person described who derives benefit from him? He makes use of him for this purpose—"*By* me if any man *enter* in." This supposes a spiritual concern. Many are careless about their souls. They have never been convinced of sin: never induced, from an apprehension of their danger, to cry, What must I do to be saved! They are men of the world: and all their anxieties are confined within the narrow bound of time and sense. Others, if in a degree awakened, are not enlightened. Their concern is erroneously directed; for there is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but it ends in death. There is a refuge that cannot abide the storm. There is a hope that is like the spider's web; as curiously wrought, and as easily destroyed. The case is this. There is salvation in none other than in him, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. In the Lord alone have we righteousness and strength. To him, therefore, must men come. And to him the Christian *does* come. He knows, not only that there is no salvation for him out of Christ, but that there is no salvation for him in Christ, without a dependence upon him, and an application to him. He knows that, as a medicine never taken, can never cure; and as food never eaten, can never nourish: so an unapplied Saviour is no Saviour to him. He therefore makes use of Christ for every end he is revealed to answer. He builds upon him, as a foundation. As a way, he walks in him. As a door, by him he enters in.

And what are the advantages he obtains when admitted? *Safety*—"He shall be saved." Saved from the curse of the law, and the wrath to come—Saved from the roaring lion, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour—Saved from the king of terrors—Saved from a world lying in wickedness—Saved from an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God—Saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation.—*Liberty*—"He shall go in and out." A man is free in his own house. He goes in and out at his pleasure—and when he goes out, he is not shut out, like a stranger; and when he goes in, he is not shut in, like a criminal. This too, is the privilege of sheep, under the care of a good shepherd. They go in; but if they could not go out, the fold would be a prison. They therefore, at night, go in for protection; and in the morning, go out for food. The expression, therefore, is used in the Scripture as significant of freedom: and the meaning is, that what is done for the Christian's safety, does not compromise his liberty. He knows the truth; and the truth makes him free: and he is free indeed—free, to go wherever he pleases in Immanuel's land—free, to partake of all the privileges of the sons of God.—*Plenty*—"And find pasture." Ah! said one of them, realizing this, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not

want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." So Isaiah—"They shall feed in the ways"—the ways of his commandments, ordinances, and dispensations—"and their pastures shall be in all high places"—where they cannot be hid; but where they may seem unlikely to find supplies; as elevations, especially in warm countries, are commonly barren—but he feeds them, while he lifts them up, for ever. Religion raises them; but not into regions of barren speculation—for it is added, "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

OCTOBER 26.

"*O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.*"—Jer. iv. 14.

Though these words are addressed to Jerusalem; by a principle of the fairest reasoning, they extend to every individual who needs the same purification and deliverance. And who does not? Yea, the circumstance strengthens the argument. Jerusalem was called the Holy City; the City of the living God. There stood his temple; there were his servants to make known his will; they had Moses and the prophets. If *they* needed such an address; is it needless for us? With all their unbelief and ingratitude, disobedience, and perverseness, they were fair specimens of the human race. In Adam, all died; and from him we derive a mortal, and therefore a depraved nature—"What is *man*, that *he* should be clean; or he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous!" All, therefore, need pardoning mercy, and sanctifying grace—All need to be saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. But here are two difficulties.

First. God himself is represented as concerned for the success of the measure. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." This interjection with us, often implies weakness and grief, as well as desire. We must therefore take care how we apply these expressions to God, lest we degrade the perfections of his nature. He speaks to us after the manner of men; but his condescension must not rob him of his glory. Yet his language is not devoid of truth. However metaphorical it may be, there is in it a reality that more than justifies it. To which we may add, that even grief and weakness had better be ascribed to God, than insincerity. Let us be assured of this, that he means what he says. While he hates our sins, he loves our souls; and is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He is not only the righteous Governor, but the kind Father. This is the lovely character under which he delights to display himself. Hence his expostulation with himself—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Hence the oath he has taken—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn, and live ye." Hence the sacrifice of the Cross—"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!" Hence all the means he is incessantly employing to awaken and engage our attention to the things that belong to our peace. Hence he has established the ministry of reconciliation, and sends forth his servants to beseech us, in his name, to be reconciled unto God.

Secondly. The work is considered as of our own achieving; and *we* are called upon to cleanse our hearts from wickedness. It would be a contradiction of the whole Bible were we to be regarded as the authors. But we are the instruments. God not only worketh in us, but by us. And hence, though all is of grace, yet *we*—"will and do." *We* believe and repent, and hold on our way, and wax stronger and stronger. It would be an abuse of the language to infer from it, that we have power to do this naturally, or of ourselves—yet the address would be absurd had we not the ability in some other way. God has the right to command, though we have lost the power to obey; but this is not the ground of the injunction. If in him our help was not found, he would not thus speak to us. But it is. His grace is sufficient for us. Every thing necessary for our deliverance from sin is provided, and presented in the Gospel: and we must have recourse to it in the use of the means which he has ordained. The address, therefore, is not like a command to a man to flee—a thing unnatural; and which he cannot enable himself to do: but like a command to a man, who was ready to perish for want, to take and eat. Though he has nothing of his own, he has in view and at hand every kind of supply, and he is welcome to partake of it. Or, like a command to a sick man to be cured: he cannot indeed heal himself, but he has one near him who is able and willing to heal him; and asks, Wilt thou be made whole! And to this remedy he is to submit. All such commands are designed to make us sensible of our wants and weakness; and to bring us upon our knees. *Then* every thing is possible. Forgiveness and sanctification are attainable—are certain. And having this hope in us, we purify ourselves even as he is pure. Having these promises,

we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

OCTOBER 27.

"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."—Jer. iv. 14.

The words remind us, that sin is of a defiling nature. It is therefore held forth by every kind of uncleanness; by wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; by leprosy and the plague; by mire and dirt; by the rottenness and corruption of the grave. It defiles every thing it touches. In consequence of it the whole creation groaneth; and all our eyes behold is doomed to perish like the house of the leper, under the law, because of the infection of the inhabitant. "O do not," says God, "the abominable thing that I hate." "My soul loathed them." How great must that evil be, which can induce the Creator to loathe the work of his own hands! The Father of all, to loathe his very offspring! And even the God of love, the very essence of mercy, to say to them at last, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! O my soul! does sin appear to thee as it does to Him—exceeding sinful?

Secondly. That the purification we need extends to the heart—"Wash thine heart from wickedness." The reason is, because this is the very seat of the pollution. Some, who know their lives are open to censure, will yet plead for the goodness of their hearts. But a good heart will always produce a good life, as naturally as a good tree yieldeth good fruit. Others contend that our corruption is not innate, but acquired; derived, not from within, but from without—Yet, says the faithful and true Witness, "From *within*, out of the *heart* of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." Hence,

> No outward forms can make us clean—
> The leprosy lies deep within."

And we must be pure in heart. How is this to be ascertained? By our deliverance from the *love* of sin. The love of sin defiles even more than the practice. But every man that is renewed in the spirit of his mind not only avoids sin, but hates it. He feels it to be his burden and his grief. And, while any of the abomination continues adherent to him, he exclaims, O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Thirdly. This purification is connected with salvation—"Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." It is *necessary* to salvation. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Indeed, in such a state, and with such a disposition, the enjoyment of heaven is as impossible as the attainment. The exclusion, therefore, is not arbitrary, but unavoidable.—It will *certainly terminate* in salvation. This is not only fully implied in the declaration, but it is made the matter of express promise—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—It is a *part of salvation*. The man who has experienced it is not only an heir, but a subject of the blessedness. He has not, indeed, the perfection of the thing, but he has more than the title and the pledge—he has the beginning. Being made free from sin, and become the servant of God, he has his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

OCTOBER 28.

"If any man love God, the same is known of him."—1 Cor. viii. 3.

There is nothing so mortifying to men as inattention and neglect. Many would rather be hated than neglected. The one implies, that they are deemed something; the other shows, that they are considered as beneath notice. Hence we are anxious to be known of our fellow-creatures; especially of those who are placed above us—and can take us by the hand—and raise us up—and put us forward in life. Yet, as men of low degree are vanity, so men of high degree are a lie. After all our servile attentions and compliances, we are never sure of gaining their regard—And if gained, what could even their zeal do for us in our most important interests? Let us turn our anxiety another way. Let us sanctify it. Let us make it the medium of our happiness. Let us be concerned to please God. Then we shall be sure to succeed; and success will be every thing. For in his favour is life—"If any man love God, the same is known of him."

This knowledge being spoken of as the highest privilege, it must intend much more than a mere acquaintance with the subjects of it: for, thus, all are known of him.

The least thing intended is *discernment*. The Lord knows their condition. Knows all their walking through this great wilderness. Knows all their trials. Knows the pressure of every burden they bear. Knows their frame, and remembers that they are dust. He perceives all their dangers. Their enemies may plot against them; but they do it in the sight of their Father and Friend. And, as to their persons, the Lord knoweth them that are his. He never overlooks them in the

crowd. If there was only one of them in a village, or city, or nation, he would have his eye upon him. However misrepresented and reproached, he recognizes them as upright before him. However obscure their condition, he views them as the excellent of the earth. However little their faith, he watches the tears with which they cry, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. However encompassed with infirmities, which sometimes perplex others, He, who knows what is the mind of the spirit, knoweth that they love him. *We* can only judge of motives by actions. But God judges of actions by motives. He seeth the heart; in consequence of which, in estimating the services of his people, he admits into the amount not only all they do, but all they design to do, and wish to do, when they are hindered; and accepts them according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. Even this is a source of satisfaction to the Christian.

But this knowledge, also, takes in *approbation*. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.—So he does the way of the ungodly. But the meaning is, he approves it; he commends it. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in them that hope in his mercy. He regards them, with complacency, as the work of his own hands. He esteems them as his jewels; his bride, his offspring. Their prayer is his delight; their alms, the odour of a sweet smell. Approbation must be valued according to the condition and character of the being from whom it comes. It would be a reproach to pass for the favourite of Satan. The first Christians would also have deemed the friendship of the world no recommendation: for they were satisfied to say, "The world knoweth us not; because it knew him not." A great personage reflects a lustre upon a near object: a person would be ambitious to be seen intimate with the king. And to live in the affections of the wise and good, says a fine writer, is like breathing in an eastern spice grove. What a dignity is it, then, to walk with God! What a blessedness to hear *Him* say, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee!" And what shall be done for the man whom the King of kings delighteth to honour?

For this knowledge is *acknowledgment*. The Apostle, admonishing the Thessalonians, says, "Know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord"—that is, own them with respect; and verbally and practically treat them as their office requires. Thus God claims his people. He owns them in the dispensations of his providence, and in the agency of his grace. He signalizes them in life. He does it often more peculiarly in death: so that his saints are joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon their beds; and induce their very enemies to exclaim, Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! But, above all, they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day, when I make up my jewels. He will confess them before the assembled earth and heavens; and place them nearer the throne than angels.

Of what importance, then, is the love of God! And how carefully should we inquire, whether it be shed abroad in our hearts! Nothing can be a substitute for this affection. Without it, our knowledge, our gifts, our faith itself, are vain. If we have any thing like devotion, it is formality. If we have peace, it is delusion. If we have safety, it is a refuge of lies. And though we may go to the very door of heaven, and knock, and say, Lord, Lord, open unto us—he will profess, "I never knew you—Depart."

OCTOBER 29.

"*In the day of my trouble, I will call upon thee.*"—Psalm lxxxvi. 7.

This was the language of David. David was a king, and a saint. He was pre-eminently great and good. Yet neither does his rank or his godliness exempt him from trouble.

But it is well to see what such a man does when trouble cometh upon him. And here we have his resolution: "In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee."

This was the wisest thing he could do; and it is the best thing we can do. For, first, Prayer is enjoined upon us in trouble. The will of God is our rule. And who can be ignorant of his command? Who has not read, "Is any afflicted? Let him pray?"

Secondly. Prayer is the design of trouble. He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. He has an end, worthy his wisdom and his goodness, to answer by every trial. It is to bring us to himself; and to bring us nearer to himself. It is to quicken us to pray more frequently, more earnestly—"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face—In their affliction they will seek me early."

Thirdly. Prayer is the evidence that trouble is sanctified. It is a great thing not to lose a trial. A trial is never neutral in its effect. It always injures, or improves. It is worse than nothing when it sends us to the creature, either in a way of accusation or relief. But when we turn to him that smiteth us; and acknowledge that his judgments are right; and cast ourselves at his feet, resolved, if we perish, *there* to die; we need not say, with Job, "I am afraid of all my sorrows;" but confess, with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Fourthly. Prayer is the solace of trouble. There is some relief in tears, and therefore

nature is provided with them. It eases and soothes the bursting heart, to pour our grief into the ear of a friend; who having rejoiced when we rejoiced, will weep when we weep. But how good is it to draw near to God! How delightful is it, like Job, to pour out our tears unto him: and resemble the child that sobs himself asleep in his mother's arms, and on his mother's breast! "A glorious high throne from the beginning," says the Church, "has been the place of our sanctuary." A temple that no evil enters; an asylum that no enemy invades—There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest.

Fifthly. Prayer is the medium of our deliverance from trouble. For this release, we are allowed to be concerned. But we must seek it from God. And in doing this, we have not only his power to encourage us—and nothing is too hard for him; but his goodness and love; and like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Yea, more: we have his faithfulness and truth; that we shall not seek him in vain. He has engaged to appear to our joy; in his own time and way. He has bound himself; and put the bond into our hand: and we can produce it; and plead it; and be surer of the fulfilment, than we are of the continuance of heaven and earth—For heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass. Here it is—"Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him."

OCTOBER 30.

"*Messiah the Prince.*"—Dan. ix. 25.

This is not the only character of the Messiah. But we must connect it with every representation we have of him; that his glory may not be injured by his condescension; nor his authority diminished by his kindness. Is he exalted at the right hand of God? It is, to be "a Prince," as well as "a Saviour." Is he a Priest? He is "a Priest upon his throne."

How is this Prince designated?

He is "the Prince of the *kings of the earth.*" They often think little of him; and, imagining themselves their own, say, Who is Lord over us? But wherein they deal proudly, he is above them. They are all raised by his power; they are all controlable by his will; they are all subservient to his designs; they are all amenable to his tribunal. Hence his avowal—"By me kings reign; and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." Hence the admonition—"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

He is "the Prince of *Peace.*" He came to mediate between heaven and earth: and we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son. Men talk of making their peace with God. If our tears, or works, or alms, could have availed for this purpose, the world would never have witnessed the sufferings of Christ. But *he* made peace by the blood of his Cross. One died for all—And he was more than all. The value of his sacrifice was infinite: and every end that could have been answered by the destruction of a world of sinners, has been equally and better answered by the death of the Saviour. Nothing will effectually satisfy an awakened conscience, but what satisfied the justice of God. Yet, surely *this* will suffice! When, therefore, it is apprehended and applied by faith, we enter into rest; and feel a peace within which passeth all understanding. By his grace, too, he reconciles us to our duty and to our condition. He frees us from those anxieties and fears which an idolatrous regard to creatures excites: and enables us to be careful for nothing, by casting all our care upon him, who careth for us. Also, by subduing our pride and selfishness, by which alone come contention; and inspiring us with love, the bond of perfectness, we live in harmony with our fellow-creatures. Yea, we are in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field are at peace with us.

He is "the Prince of *Life.*" Other princes, however powerful, are mortal: and this is a reason why we should not put our trust in them: their breath goeth forth, they return to their dust: in that very day their thoughts perish. But Jesus liveth for ever: and because he lives, his people live also. Other princes, while they are living themselves, cannot impart life to others—though, alas! they often take it away; and sacrifice thousands of their subjects to their own lusts. But Jesus had not only life in himself, but came that we might have life: and have it more abundantly. He procured, and he communicates, and sustains a life superior to that of Adam in Paradise, and to that of angels in glory. This is the promise that God hath promised us, even *eternal* life. And *this* life is *in* his Son. He therefore that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life.

He has other designations; and all come short of his praise. But these are sufficient to show how safe and how happy all they are

who have become his subjects. It was a fine compliment that Hiram paid Solomon, when he said, "Surely, because the Lord loved Israel, therefore made he thee king over them." How much more has God shown his goodness to his people, in setting this King upon his holy hill of Zion! Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them make their boast in the Lord; and in his righteousness be exalted.

Let them also be concerned to approve themselves wise, and good, and loyal subjects, to the best of Princes: so that, instead of disgracing him, they may be to him for a name and a praise among all those who shall hear of so great a people.

But wo to those who reject his sceptre. As for these mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth and slay them before me.

OCTOBER 31.

"*Prayer shall be made for him continually.*"
Psalm lxxii. 15.

We are not only to pray; but to pray without ceasing. We are not only to pray for ourselves; but for others. We are to pray for kings, and all that are in authority; for ministers; for all saints; for even our enemies, who despitefully use us and persecute us; and, what may seem strange—we are to pray for Jesus Christ. "Prayer also shall be made for him continually."

Is prayer then necessary for *him?* Is he not above the reach of danger, pain, and want? Yes. He who once had not where to lay his head, has all power in heaven and in earth: he dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. The meaning, therefore, cannot be, that prayer should be continually made for him personally; but relatively. Owing to the interest he has in certain objects; what is done for them is done for himself; and so he esteems it. We therefore pray for him, when we pray for his ministers; his ordinances; his Gospel; his Church—in a word,—his CAUSE. David, therefore, exemplifying what he had foretold, immediately breaks forth and says—"And blessed be his glorious Name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."

But *what* should we pray for on his behalf! Our prayers should vary with the state of his cause: but we should always bear four things upon our minds. First. The degree of its resources; that there be always a sufficiency of suitable and able instruments to carry on the work—To this the Saviour himself directs us: "The harvest truly is great; but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest."—Secondly. The freedom of his administration; that whatever opposes or hinders its progress may be removed. "Pray for us," says the Apostle, "that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." Thirdly. The diffusion of its principles; that they may become general and universal; spreading through every family, neighbourhood, and province and realm. So prayed of old even the pious Jew: "That thy way may be known on earth; thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee."—Fourthly. The increase of its glory, as well as its extent; that it may abound more in wisdom, purity, spirituality, charity, and zeal: that the light of the moon may be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun be seven-fold as the light of seven days; that for brass, he would bring gold; and for iron, silver; and for wood, brass; and for stones, iron. Thus, they that make mention of the Lord are to "give him no rest"—not only until he "establish"—but "make Jerusalem *a praise* in the whole earth."

But *why* should we be concerned to pray for Him?—Consistency requires it. We are the professors of Christ. We profess to be his servants—but can we be wise and good servants, if we are neglectful of our Master's affairs? We profess to be his subjects—but can we be loyal subjects, if we are indifferent to the glory of our Sovereign? We profess to be his friends—but can we be true and faithful friends, unless we make his interests our own; mourn over his dishonour, and rejoice in his prosperity?—Benevolence requires it. The Gospel is the greatest of all blessings to the children of men. Wherever it enters, the wilderness and the solitary place is made glad, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. It is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth; and where it does not save the soul, it yields a thousand advantages to the community. Who would not wish *him* success? *His* career is the march of truth, and righteousness and peace. *He* makes the widow's heart to sing for joy. In *him* the fatherless findeth mercy.

> "Blessings abound where'er *He* reigns:
> The pris'ner leaps to lose his chains;
> The weary find eternal rest;
> And all the sons of want are blest."

—Gratitude requires it. How much do we owe him! When we consider what he has done, is doing, and will do, for us; all we are, and all we have, appear to be his, by a thousand claims; and nothing can equal our vileness, if we are not led hourly to ask, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

But what reason have we to conclude that these prayers for him will be *heard?* Much every way. The prayers indeed even of good

men, are not always answered. Sometimes they know not what they ask. And when they implore what would prove evil, God's wisdom and kindness lead him to refuse. But whatsoever we ask according to his will, he heareth us. And has he not commanded us to pray, that his kingdom may come! Has he not promised it! Is not the grand condition fulfilled—"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed; he shall prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands?" Can his death be unavailable! Can the engagements of the everlasting covenant be made void! We *cannot* pray for him in vain.

But what is necessary to evince that our praying for him is *sincere?* For there is much prayer that is a mere mockery of God. Out of their own mouths many will be condemned hereafter: and they would feel themselves condemned already, were it not that the heart is deceitful above all things as well as desperately wicked. A man prays to redeem his time, and to have his conversation in heaven; and goes and sits in a place of dissipation for the answer. A father prays for the salvation of his child; and does all in his power to leave him affluent; and surrounded with temptations that render his conversion a miracle. A third prays to be—condemned; for he prays, Forgive us our trespasses, *as* we forgive them that trespass against us: and he is implacable.—When a man sincerely desires a thing, in proportion as he desires it, he will seek after it; and use all the means placed within his reach to obtain it. When, therefore, a person professes a great concern for a thing, and neglects whatever is necessary to it, we make no scruple to tax him with folly or falsehood. Let us do, in religious matters, what we do in other cases—Let us judge of our faith, by our practice; and of our hearts, by our lives.

What then, you say, must we do to prove that our prayers in the cause of Christianity are sincere? Do! Some of you should come forward and offer go to forth as missionaries. What hinders! Nothing in your condition: nothing in your connexions. Nothing but the love of ease; and the fear of suffering; and the want of the *spirit* of the prayer—Arise, O Lord, and plead thine own cause. Do! Live for him. All cannot go abroad. But all have a sphere in which they may be useful. They may hold forth the word of life, by their temper and conversation.—Do! Employ all your influence with others; provoking them to love and to do good works.—Do! Give according to your opportunity and ability—exercising self-denial, to enlarge your ability. Read the whole verse of our text—"And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised."

NOVEMBER 1.

"*How readest thou.*"—Luke x. 26.

It is well to be able to read. Thousands are not; and so cannot thus agreeably fill up their leisure moments; nor improve their minds by the written communications of others. But whatever a thing be in itself, the *use* we are to make of it, is to determine, whether it be to us, good or evil; a blessing or a curse.

Some will lament for ever, that they were taught to read. They never improved so great a talent. Yea, they perverted and abused it. They read books which undermined their principles, defiled their imaginations, and demoralized their lives. But others are thankful for such an attainment. It has afforded them not only gratification, and profit; but spiritual improvement, and consolation. One, in reading, has been converted from the error of his ways. Another, has been guided in his experimental and practical doubts and difficulties. A third, has been revived while walking in the midst of trouble.

And if this has been the case while reading other books, how much more while reading the Scriptures of truth. This volume you are bound, above all other books, to read. It is your duty. It is your privilege—But how readest thou? How *ought* you to read it?

First. You ought to read it as the dictates of Inspiration. You do not, perhaps, deny, or question this; but you ought actually and frequently to impress the mind with it; that when you open these pages, you may say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." The Apostle admonishes the Hebrews not to turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. He does not say, who *spake*—but who *speaketh.* The address is to be considered as immediate. It is so to us, as well as to those who originally heard it. Had it been just written, it could have had no more authority, and have been no more deserving of attention than now. How much depends upon this advice! For as we receive the word, so shall we be affected by it. If we regard it as false, it will produce no result. If as human, it will influence as human. But if divine, it will operate divinely. Hence says the Apostle to the Thessalonians; "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Secondly. Let him that readeth, understand. The Eunuch, returning from Jerusalem in his chariot, was reading; and reading even the prophecies of Isaiah; but Philip said to him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" To know the meaning of the Scrip-

tures, it is a good thing to read on, till we come to the end of a paragraph or subject, regardless of the divisions in chapters and verses. These breaks are useful, and they are generally made in their proper places; but not always: in consequence of which, the sense is injured or darkened, by the writer's closing before he has finished; or commencing something in the middle of the argument. —Neither should we lay too much stress on a particular word or phrase; but be guided by the natural current of the passage; and endeavour always to apprehend what is the *present* design of the sacred writer. Here good common sense will often do more than the learned affectations of expositors, who frequently elude the solution of a difficult text; and throw doubts into a clear one. While we ought to avail ourselves of every assistance from the labours of others; and, above all, to exercise our own minds; we must be humble in our inquiries, and feel and acknowledge our need of divine guidance, to lead us into all truth. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law." So prayed David—and so must we—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Thus, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err: and without this, the scholar and the genius will for ever go astray. The great impediment to divine knowledge is *the state of the heart:* and as soon as we are made deeply sensible of our need of what the Gospel is designed to afford: and willing to be saved in the Lord's own way; and to walk so as to please him: every thing opens easily and delightfully; and the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. But this can only be obtained from "the *Spirit* of truth."

Thirdly. We should read with a view to self-application. Instead of thinking of others —which is too frequently the case—we should think of ourselves; inquiring how it bears upon our own character and condition; and how, as Lord Bacon says, it comes home to our own businesses and bosoms. If I read a threatening—"O my soul, do I stand exposed to this danger?" If I read a promise —"May I claim this blessing?" If I read a reproof or a commendation—"Am I censured by the one? or encouraged by the other?" "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?"

Fourthly. We should read with a determination to reduce what we read to experience and practice. The design of all the instruction contained in the Scripture is to bear upon the conscience and the life. The doctrine is not only according to grace, but according to godliness. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. This is the way to increase with all the increase of God. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. If a man do his will, he shall know of his doctrine. We may apply to reading, what the apostle James has said of hearing: "But be ye doers of the word, and not readers only, deceiving your ownselves. For if any be a *reader* of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful *reader*, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

NOVEMBER 2.

"*His time in the flesh.*"—1 Peter iv. 2.

"Flesh" is not to be taken, here, morally; but physically. It is not here used to signify our corruption, but our present existence—as when Paul says, The life that I now live "in the flesh," I live by the faith of the Son of God. It intends, therefore, our life while *in the body.* For we shall not be *in* it always—a period is approaching when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Our "time" in the flesh varies in circumstances with regard to individuals. But it has four general characters applicable to all the human race.

First. It is chequered. The young may look forward and view life in the fascinations of hope; and the aged may look back, and more congenially dwell on the gloomy, than on the cheerful: and the same man, in the hour of present impression, may feel himself too much elated, or too much depressed with his condition—but the truth is the same. It is neither a paradisaical, nor a wilderness scene. It is neither entirely dark, or light; but intermingled sunshine and shade. Who ever found life so smooth as to have no roughness? And who ever had sickness without ease? or sorrow without comfort? And who is now authorized to say, To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant? or, Mine eye shall no more see good?

Secondly. It is short. And short, not only as to eternity, and the ages of men before the Flood; but absolutely short. The general duration is threescore years and ten. But much of this is nothing, as to the superior purposes of our being. We do not mean business: this may not only be rendered consistent with religion, but is made by a Christian who abides with God in his calling, a part of it.—But there is the weakness of infancy, and the childhood of age. There are the deductions of *needful* sleep, and allowed

recreation, and unavoidable intercourse. It is often also cut short. How few reach seventy! And those who do, commonly look in vain to find any of the associates of their youth or maturity. Every thing expressive of brevity is seized by the sacred writers to hold forth the brevity of our time in the flesh —a flower; a flood; a tale; a dream; a vapour; a ship before the wind; an eagle pouncing on his prey—There is but a step between us and death.

Thirdly. It is uncertain. How can it be otherwise, when we consider the diseases and accidents to which we are continually exposed? and the feebleness of our frame? and the number and delicacy of the organs of which the body is composed? Sixty times every minute, as our pulse tells us, the question is asked, whether we shall live or die. The fool in the Gospel said, I have much goods laid up for many years; soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry: but that very night his soul was required of him. Persons just ready to enter connected life, have been called from marriage rites to attend funeral solemnities. The owners have been just ready to take possession of a new mansion, but have been carried to their long home. And the traveller, starting for his journey, has gone the way of all the earth.

But, fourthly. It is important. Yea, all-important, by reason of its relation to another, and an eternal state. It is not only an introduction to this state—but a preparation for it. It is influentially connected with it, as the sowing with the harvest. Our thoughts, words, and actions, are the seed; and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. The present is the only season of obtaining justification and renovation: a title to heaven, and a meetness for it. *Now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

The same will apply to our doing good, as well as to our gaining good. Our time in the flesh is the only season in which we can glorify God, and serve our generation! What a treasure then is life! And how concerned should we be to work while it is day, seeing the night cometh wherein no man can work! In this one article the saints below are more privileged than the saints above: and we are persuaded, that those who have entered their rest would be willing, were it the pleasure of God, to come down and re-enter this vale of tears, to have the opportunities of usefulness we enjoy—who can be candid towards those who differ from us; forgive injuries; visit and relieve the afflicted; spread the Gospel; teach the ignorant; save souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."

NOVEMBER 3.

"*As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing.*
2 Cor. vi. 10.

This is the duty; this is the privilege of the Christian. Whether he considers and feels himself in a state of exile—or warfare—or perplexity—or penury—or varying experience—or misapprehension from others; if "sorrowful," he may, and he ought to be able to say—"Yet alway rejoicing."

Though dwelling with strangers around,
And foreign and weary the land,
I homeward to Zion am bound—
The day of release is at hand.
Then, Mesech and Kedar, farewell,
To enter my welcome abode:
With friends and with angels to dwell,
With Jesus, my Saviour and God!

Though hourly summon'd to arms,
And legions against me combine,
I'm calm in the midst of alarms,
My weapons and cause are divine.
A Captain almighty I own;
And banner'd by faith in his Name,
I shout, ere the battle is won—
I more than a conqueror *am!*

Perplexings though often I feel,
And mazy the paths that I tread,
My God has been leading me still,
And still he has promised to lead.
The crooked shall all be made straight,
The darkness shall beam into light;
I have but a moment to wait,
And faith shall be turned to sight

If small my allotment below,
I will not at others repine;
Their joy is the gilding of wo,
Their wealth they must quickly resign.
Though poor, how much richer am I!
In want I have all I desire;
My treasures, the soul can supply,
And last when the stars shall expire!

If, weeping and fearing, I pass
Through changes, in state and in frame,
Yet, constant in power and grace,
My Saviour is always the same.
No shadow of turning he knows,
Whose bliss is the fountain of mine;
And while his eternity flows,
My happiness cannot decline.

How little the multitude know,
Or, knowing, how little they prize,
The spring whence my joys ever flow,
Or source of my bitterest sighs!
But both the dear secret reveal,
That Jesus hath soften'd this heart,
And soon all my joys will fulfil,
And bid all my sighing depart.

NOVEMBER 4.

"*Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*"—Mat. viii. 7.

We may consider these words as —An answer to prayer. And let us observe *whose* prayer it was. He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek *ye* me in vain. But this centurion was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; a Roman; a Gentile. Yet *he* is immediately heard. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Whoever I am, let me therefore apply to

nim, animated by the assurance, him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. Let us observe, also, *what* prayer it was. It was not a prayer for the petitioner himself; but for another. As he never refused any who addressed him on their own behalf; so he never refused any that addressed him on the account of others. Let this teach and encourage us to pray for others. Let friends pray for friends; and parents for their children; and masters and mistresses for their servants—We are commanded to pray for all men.

We may consider the words as an instance of condescension. He was fairer than the children of men; higher than the kings of the earth. All the angels of God worshipped him. Yet no sooner is his goodness implored, than, in a moment, he is ready to go and stand by the side of the pallet of a poor sick slave!—I will come and heal him. The master was very humane and compassionate, or he would not have taken the trouble to send to our Lord, on the behalf of one considered so much below him. What is a slave, to many an owner? No more than a beast of burden. David found an Egyptian in the field, who had eaten no bread nor drunk any water for three days and three nights: "And David said unto him, To whom belongest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days agone I fell sick." A wretch! How unlike him was this Centurion! But he, even *he*, is surprised, and scarcely knows how to accept of the Saviour's offer—Yea, he even deems it condescension to *himself—I* am not worthy that *thou* shouldest come under *my* roof. And shall not *we* condescend to men of low estate? "Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?"

We may consider the words as a display of power. I will come and attend him, would be the language of a friend. I will come and pray with him, would be the language of a minister. I will come and examine his case, and see if I can afford him relief, would be the language of the physician. But Jesus speaks like himself—I will come and heal him. He knew his own sufficiency. And the Centurion knew it. It was the principle of his reasoning—"Though I am not the commander-in-chief, but a subordinate officer, yet it is not necessary even for *me* to go to a place, in order to act. My *word* is enough—I say to one of my soldiers, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. How much more, O Lord! are all creatures and events under thy control! Thy word runneth very swiftly. Neither disease nor death can withstand it." So our Saviour understood him. He therefore admired him and said, I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel. And we should have the same strong confidence in his ability—That he is mighty to save—able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. For

We may consider the words as affording an emblem of the salvation of the sinner. Whatever some may think of human nature, we are fallen creatures; we are spiritually diseased; and there is no health in us; and we are ready to perish; and are incapable of recovering ourselves; but he says, Lo! I come—I will come and heal him. It was the design of his coming in the flesh—The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. It is the purpose of his coming now in the agency of his grace—I will bring them, says he, health and cure. He heals them meritoriously, by his stripes; efficiently, by his Spirit; instrumentally, by his word, ordinances, and providences. The recovery indeed, he is pleased to carry on by degrees. He could, by one application, yea, by one volition, remove all their complaints: but it does not comport with his wisdom. His people, therefore, continue his patients; and are no more than convalescents all through life. But if slow, the recovery is sure—Nothing can elude his skill, or baffle his remedy. When dying, they may say, with Baxter, "Almost well"—And when they enter Immanuel's land, the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick.

NOVEMBER 5.

"*This God is our God for ever and ever.*"
Psalm xlviii. 14.

This is the language of a proprietary in God. And it is founded in truth. In the covenant of grace established, not with them, but with the surety, he has, so to speak, made over himself to his people, saying—I will be thy God. I am thine, and all that I have; my perfections; my relations; my works; my word; my ordinances; my dispensations. I am thy salvation; to thee I am all and in all. Hence there is no propriety like this, not only for the value of it, but the reality itself. Justly speaking, nothing else *is* our *own*. Our time is not our own. Our wealth is not our own. Our children are not our own. Our bodies, our souls are not our own—But God *is* our own—And God, even our *own* God, shall bless us.

It is the language of an assured proprietary. This God is *our* God. The relation may be known and claimed. And with what a repetition does David express it!—"I will love thee, O Lord, *my* strength. The Lord is *my* rock, and *my* fortress, and *my* deliverer; *my* God, *my* strength, in whom I will trust; *my* buckler, and the horn of *my* salvation, and *my* high tower." Here are no less, in a few words, than eight appropriations. And how

desirable is it to be able to ascertain and express our own interest in all his engagements!

"When I can say, my God is mine,
And I can feel thy glories shine,
I tread the world beneath my feet,
And all that earth calls good and great"—

Then I am satisfied with his goodness. But can the thing be made out?—and how? They mistake who suppose this relation results from our choosing him, and giving ourselves to him. We do this indeed; but it is by his grace. And, in us, this is the effect, and not the cause. But as it is the effect, it is therefore the evidence. And in this way we are to trace back the stream to the fountain; making our calling, and thereby our election, sure. If we have chosen him, we may be assured he has chosen us; and if we love him, we may be assured he loves us: for one is the consequence of the other—We love him, because he first loved us.

It is the language of a permanent proprietary. This God is our God *for ever and ever*. Without this, the blessedness would make us miserable. The dearer and greater a treasure be, the more alive we are to anxiety and fear; and nothing but the assurance of its safety can enable us cordially to enjoy it. No confidence is so well founded as the Christian's. Every other possession is precarious. Every other relation is breaking up. But he may, he can say, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is the language of an exulting proprietary. Boasting is excluded by the law of faith. But what boasting? All glorying in ourselves; but not in God. "My soul," says David, "shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." "*This* is my beloved, and *this* is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem—What is yours?" So here. *This* God is our God for ever and ever—What is yours, O ye sons of men? Their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies themselves being judges.

NOVEMBER 6.

"*There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets.*"—Dan. ii. 28.

Daniel was perhaps the most blameless character recorded in the Scriptures. Of course *He* is excepted from the comparison, who was "fairer than the children of men." Neither do we mean to intimate that he was sinless. He had an evil heart to lament before God; but, with regard to his conduct before men, as a professor of religion—nothing is laid to his charge. And what an honour was it to be spoken of, while living—and while young, too—by a prophet—in company with Noah and Job—as one of those who were most likely to have power with God, as intercessors!

Here we see his humility. The king said unto him, "Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded, cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets." Why does he mention this, but because he would prevent the commendation of himself! and that the only wise God should have the glory that was due unto his holy name? And thus another fine character, jealous of the Divine honour, said to his sovereign, "It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." The most eminent of all characters in the Christian Church also said, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Contrast with these, two of the most famous of the Heathen philosophers and moralists: one of whom said—"That we have riches, is of the gods; but that we have wisdom, is of ourselves." And the other—"A good man is, in one respect, above the gods themselves: for they are good by the necessity of nature; but he is good by choice!"

But what is the praise that Daniel transfers from himself to God? The revelation of secrets. Men are fond of secrets. With regard to themselves, they are always wishful to pry into futurity. Almanacks must therefore have something to feed this humour, or half their number would not be sold. Mistresses as well as servant-maids; the old as well as the young; would show their palms to the fortune-teller, were it not for the fear of ridicule. Were the Witch of Endor alive, many would repair to her; and, like Saul, consult the Devil himself at second-hand. Envy makes us inquisitive, with regard to rivals; fear, with regard to enemies; and love, with regard to friends. It was curiosity, operating in a way of attachment, that led Peter to inquire after the destination of John—"Lord, and what shall this man do?" But the Lord did not even encourage *this*—"What is that to thee? follow thou me."

The secret things belong unto God; but things that are revealed are for us, and for our children. Concerning many things, he is silent: and, where he says nothing, we are not to be wise above what is written.

But He *can* reveal secrets. His understanding is infinite. Hell is naked before him,

and destruction hath no covering. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

He *has* revealed secrets. He enabled Daniel to explain the import of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and foretell the succession of the four monarchies. He showed Moses what the Jews would be, at this very hour. What a divine prerogative was prophecy! We may conjecture; but we really know not what a day may bring forth. We may argue from causes to effects; but the existence and operation of the causes themselves depend upon the will of another. We may infer from probabilities: but the natural tendencies of things are liable to accidental derangements; and the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Besides, as to the predictions of Scripture, many of them regarded things so remote, that what *immediately* preceded them, could not possibly be discerned. And others regarded events the most unlikely to take place of all occurrences in the world—And yet, when we look into history, we see how it accords with these announcements. How can we account for this, but by admitting, that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

He *does* reveal secrets. How many now living has he called out of darkness into his marvellous light! Not that he has communicated to their minds things new in themselves; but they were new to them. The sun had been shining; but they had been in the dark, because they were blind. All the doctrine was in the Bible before: but he now leads them into all truth; and shows them not only the reality of divine things, but their importance and glory. Give a man a taste for a book of music, or science of any kind; and he will see a thousand things entirely new to him, though he possessed the work before. So "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned: but the spiritual judgeth all things." So the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he shows them his covenant, as to their interest in its engagements and provisions. And what a discovery is this! How anxious will every awakened mind be to possess it!

> "Oh! tell me that my worthless name
> Is graven on thy hands;
> Show me some promise in thy book
> Where my salvation stands!"

Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. And what is the promise? "I will give him to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—He also shows them the secrets of his providence, as well of his grace. They know what he is doing, and what he will do. They know that he is fulfilling his own word, and making all things to work together for their good. They know, that "behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face;" and that even when he slays them, they have reason to trust in him. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

He *will* reveal secrets. Yes; there is "a day, in the which," says the Apostle, "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel." Then will be developed—dreadful secrets. Then many, who had a name here, will be disowned. They had honoured him with their lips, and gained the notice of their fellow-creatures; but their hearts had been far from him. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?—Pleasing secrets. Then, they who are now deemed the enemies of the Cross of Christ, will be found to have been its friends. Then, they who are now considered as indifferent to holiness and good works, will appear to have mourned for sin, and prayed for purity. Then, the tear dropped upon the Bible in the closet; the private act of charity; the frequent intercession for others; will be displayed and commended—He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.—Divine secrets. He will show, why he permitted the entrance of moral evil; delayed so long the coming of his Son; suffered his Gospel to be so impeded, and his Church to be so afflicted; and more than justify all his ways to men. What is now perplexing, will be made plain. What now seems disorderly, will be arranged. What now seems jarring, will be harmonized. What now seems defective, will be complete. And then, not as now, from faith, but from sight, the acknowledgment will be made, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he." To many these mysteries are already explained—When shall we have an inheritance with the saints in light?

NOVEMBER 7.

"*For neither did his brethren believe him.*"
John vii. 5.

How is this charge to be understood? Two distinctions or limitations are necessary. First. It cannot be taken literally as to the name—"his brethren." Even those who very pre-

perly reject the notion of her perpetual virginity, do not suppose that these were really the children of Mary, our Lord's mother. The question which divides the ancients and the moderns turns upon this—whether they were the offspring of Joseph, by a former marriage; or whether they were born of Salome, Mary's sister, and so were our Lord's cousins-german. The latter is the more probable conclusion. Among the Jews, kinsmen in various degrees were called brethren. Abraham and Lot were uncle and nephew; yet, says the former to the latter, "We are brethren." The meaning therefore is, that our Lord's more near and remote kindred did not believe on him. But, secondly; this cannot be taken universally, as to the fact. For three of his brethren, at least, were found in the number of his apostles—Simon, and Jude, and James the less, who is expressly called the Lord's brother. The Scripture does not gratify our curiosity; we know but little of Mary's or Joseph's relations: they seem to have been numerous: and the language before us must intimate that not only some, but comparatively many of them, had no real faith in him.

This is a very surprising announcement. But it is very instructive. Does it not favour the truth of Christianity? Had all our Lord's relations recommended and followed him, his cause might have looked human and suspicious. We know what advantage Mahomet derived from the attachment and employment of his kindred. But here every appearance of family contrivance is excluded; and we see that our Lord did not act by rules of carnal policy: his kingdom was not of this world; his Gospel was left to its own evidence and energy; and derived no assistance from the auxiliaries of error, superstition, or idolatry.

We see also what evidence may be resisted, and what means may be rendered ineffectual, by the depravity of human nature. These men had attended his preaching, and he spake as never man spake. They had often heard his conversation. They had received many instructions, reproofs, and encouragements from him, in a manner the most adapted to insure success. They had gone up with him to the festivals, and had seen his devotion. Some of them were present when he turned the water into wine. They had seen him open the eyes of the blind. Yes; these very men, "his brethren, therefore, said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world." As his relations, they must have known the circumstances of his birth; the appearance of the angel to the shepherds; the journey of the wise men; the prophesying of Simeon and Anna; the testimony of John; the descent of the Holy Ghost in his baptism; his holy and heavenly life—Nevertheless, such were their prejudices and worldly dispositions, that they did not believe on him. It was not *evidence* they wanted; nor is it a want of evidence that induces persons to reject him now. The source of infidelity is not intellectual, but moral. Were it not criminal, it would not be punishable. But this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. We think some means *must* be irresistible—but we forget that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—Neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

And from hence, we need not wonder if inferior characters are unsuccessful in their pious attempts. Ministers may be faithful and zealous, and yet be constrained to complain, "Who hath believed our report?" Masters may be wise and good: yet what a servant had Elisha, in Gehazi! Parents should do every thing in their power for the spiritual welfare of their children; and, in a general way, they may hope for success: but let them not wonder if, in some instances, even their tears, and examples, and entreaties, are in vain!

Let those who have irreligious relatives think of Jesus. He was in this point tempted as they are. He can sympathize with them. He remembers the feelings of his heart, when even his own kindred turned away from him.

Hence none will be saved by mere relationship. Let none say, therefore, within themselves, we have Abraham to our father. The parable tells us of one in hell, who called Abraham father; and was refused by him the least gratification. It is a mercy to have pious connexions: but religion is a personal thing; and if we refuse to tread in their steps, the blessing will be turned into a curse: and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when we shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; and we ourselves shut out.

Finally. It is better to be of the spiritual kindred of Jesus, than of his family according to the flesh. When, therefore, the woman exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked;" he himself replied, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." The spiritual relation to him can never be dissolved: and it will insure every thing essential to our safety, honour, wealth, power, and happiness for ever. As the natural relation to him was not saving, so it was necessarily confined to few. But this lies open to all. "Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered

and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother! and who are my brethren! And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

NOVEMBER 8.

"And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"—Matt. ix. 11.

THIS is connected with a concise narrative of the conversion of the writer of this Gospel. For the account *of* himself, is furnished *by* himself.—It is a delicate thing for a man to write concerning himself: but the sacred authors are above all suspicion. They are always faithful and impartial; and their only aim is truth. Though Matthew here speaks of himself, the reference was unavoidable; and he only introduces the servant, for the sake of the Master.

The case was this. After leaving the privacy of Nazareth, our Lord came and dwelt in Capernaum. This town, as it was situated on the lake of Galilee, gave him an opportunity to pass easily in the fishing boats of his followers to any parts of the adjoining country—"And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man sitting at the receipt of custom:" that is, he was receiving the tolls from the goods landed, and embarked on the quay. As Luke tells us, that he made a great feast, and bade many, it is probable he was possessed of considerable property; and, from the common character of publicans, we might be tempted to conclude, that it was the produce of illegal exaction. But it would be invidious to draw such an inference. Even a publican was not necessarily wicked: and the consciousness Zaccheus had, of freedom from extortion, is obvious from his appeal; "If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." It is even the duty of official agents to be exact and full in lawful demands. We will therefore take it for granted, that Matthew was rightfully engaged when our Saviour took knowledge of him; and, as Divine favour has been shown towards many others recorded in the Scriptures, while filling up the duties of their station, we learn that diligence in our calling is acceptable to God, as well as approved of men. The angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds while keeping their flocks by night, and announced the birth of the Messiah. Saul was seeking his father's asses when Samuel met him, and anointed him king over Israel. While drawing water at the well, Rebecca, and Rachel, and Zipporah, found each a husband—The woman of Samaria found the Saviour of the world.

Here it may be asked, Was our Lord's thus meeting with Matthew the effect of chance, or of design? To this question we boldly answer, Of design. There is nothing accidental in the conversion of a sinner. If a man be saved, and called with a holy calling in time, it is according to God's purpose and grace given him in Christ Jesus before the world began.

—"And he saith to him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him." He hath a mighty voice. He upholds all things by the word of his power. By the same word he made them all. He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. He said, Let there be light, and there was light. So it was in the old creation; and in the new, he calleth things which are not, and they appear. As the address was instantaneous, so the obedience was immediate. What a change did the call produce in the soul of this man! How did it enlighten his mind, and inflame his heart! Doubtless his head was filled with worldly cares; but this voice, like a charm, dispossesses him. The meanness of our Saviour's appearance, and the lowness of his attendants, weigh nothing with him. He was now in prosperity; he was to leave a gainful office; and perhaps saw before him only reproach and persecution: but he is satisfied; and would rather be a poor minister of Christ, than a rich officer of Cæsar. In a case of such magnitude, it might be supposed that he would have required some time to consider and examine matters. But, like Paul, he confers not with flesh and blood. The King's business requires haste. True obedience is always prompt and unreserved.—He immediately followed him. O blessed Jesus, may thy call to us be so effectual, that *when* thou sayest, "Seek ye my face;" our hearts may answer, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek." And, at thy bidding, may we arise, and forsaking every carnal pursuit and worldly attachment, follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth!

Though Matthew formally surrendered his office, and all its concerns, we have no reason to believe that he sacrificed his effects. Rather, we are persuaded, that he carefully secured them, to be properly used and applied. Whatever we possess at the time of our calling may be consecrated to the Redeemer, and advantageously employed in his service, and the cause of benevolence. And when the heart is open, the hand and the house cannot be shut. Matthew therefore makes an entertainment for our Lord: and, "behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples." These persons had formerly visited Matthew; partly for business, and partly for pleasure: now they came, invited by him with the hope of their deriving benefit from our Saviour's conversation. "Who knows," says he, "but

the voice that has reached my heart, may also call them by his grace?" How invariably is such a disposition found in every subject of divine grace! Come with us, said Moses to Hobab, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. O taste and see, says David, that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Come, and see him, said the woman of Samaria to her neighbours. In the same spirit Matthew makes a feast, to which he calls his old friends and companions. And our Saviour gave them the cheerful, though not the sinful meeting: teaching us thereby not to be repulsive in our manners—nor to refuse social intercourse. Of two things, however, we should be careful—To design good, as our Saviour did, when we enter company—and also to remember the difference there is between him and us. He had no corruption within for temptation to operate upon; while we are easily receptive of corrupt impressions; and must always watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation.

—But the Pharisees, pious souls! when they saw this, were scandalized. Yet, as Satan always loves to get over the hedge where the fence is lowest, and as he assailed Eve apart from her husband, so they, from fear, do not express their dissatisfaction to our Lord himself, but "said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" What did they mean? It was the tradition of the Elders, that the sanctified and devout should never be seen in company with the wicked. Affecting superior sanctity, they acted upon this principle themselves; and said, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; I am holier than thou." And they here insinuate, that if Jesus was what he professed to be, he would shun such characters as he was now with. And they seem even to feel a concern for his honour. All this was mere pretence, supported by malice and envy. They were strangers to every feeling of piety or benevolence. They strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel. They made long prayers for a pretence, and devoured widows' houses. They were wolves in sheep's clothing: sepulchres painted without, and full of rottenness within.

If we are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile, we shall be severe towards ourselves, and candid towards others. We shall see more evil in our own hearts than we can ever see in the conduct of our fellow-creatures. And though, in proportion as we are pure and heavenly, we *must* feel whatever is contrary thereto—we shall bewail it before God, rather than complain of it to men. And never shall we, when the character is fair, and the life blameless, go a motive-hunting, and indulge in the vileness of suspicion. Let us not judge, that we be not judged. Let us remember, that he who knows what is in man, represents censoriousness as the *offspring* and *proof* of hypocrisy. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." O for more of that charity that "thinketh no evil; that rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things!"

NOVEMBER 9.

"*But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*"—Matt. ix. 12.

To perceive the force of these words, we must remember the design of them. They are in justification of our Lord's conduct. Matthew, having been called by his grace to follow him, made an entertainment, to which he invited his former friends and companions; hoping that they might derive advantage from the intercourse. But when the Pharisees saw it, they were offended, and said to his disciples, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" Though the murmur was not addressed to *himself*, it *concerned* himself; and he was acquainted with it: and though the complainers were undeserving of his notice—and he was under no obligation to vindicate what he was doing—he said, "I am about my proper business. I have not mistaken the objects of my attention. I came to seek and to save that which was lost. I could now have been enjoying the company of angels in heaven. My mixing, on such an occasion, with publicans and sinners, is not agreeable in itself—but I entered the world as a physician. Where should a physician be, but among the disordered and dying? They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

The vindication insinuates the real condition of mankind. They are diseased. We refer to their moral maladies. The soul has its disorders, as well as the body; and the disorders of the soul are worse than those of the body. They vitiate a nobler part; they expose to a greater danger. The consequence of the one is only temporal death; the result of the other is death eternal. These maladies are the effects of the Fall; and they may be seen in the errors of the judgment—the rebellion of the will—the pollution of the conscience—the sensuality of the affections—the debasement and violence of the passions. We are sometimes blamed for degrading human nature. But we do not undervalue it,

as the workmanship of God; or as to its physical and intellectual powers: but only as to its moral state and propensities. And here, not only the language of the Liturgy, but all Scripture, and history, and observation, and experience, proclaim that "there is no health in us."

It also gives an implied character of himself. He is every thing that fallen, perishing creatures can need: and he stands in the same relation to them as a physician to his patients. "I am the Lord that healeth thee," is a proclamation that well becomes his lips. Job disclaimed his friends as "physicians of no value." But this can never be applied to the Lord Jesus. In all things, in this office, he has the pre-eminence. Yea, he not only stands without comparison, but alone—there is salvation in none other. But *he heals* every complaint. No case, however difficult, baffles his skill. No case, however desperate, resists the power of his applications. He is always at home. Always accessible. Always delighted to attend. He only requires our submission to his management. He cures without money and without price.

It also describes those who disregard, and those who value him. They who reject him, are "the whole." None are *really* whole: for there is none righteous; no, not one. But they are so as to apprehension and experience. And such have always been awfully numerous. Such was Paul, "while alive without the law once." Such was the Pharisee that went up into the temple to pray. Such were all the Pharisees, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Such were the Laodiceans, who said, We are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. Such were Solomon's generation, who were pure in their own eyes, and not washed from their filthiness. Such, also, are they who, though they make no pretensions to self-righteousness, are satisfied with themselves; the careless; the worldly, who live without one serious thought of their souls and eternity. Yea, such, too, are they who receive the charge in theory, and acknowledge it, as they do any other Bible sentiment; but there rest—not impressed with the truth so as to urge them to the Saviour—and so he will profit them nothing.

They who value him are "the sick." They are sensible of their malady. They have a clear and deep conviction of their guilt, and depravity, and helplessness. They are thrown into the consternation persons would feel if they discovered they had taken the plague. They feel pain. They forebode death. They exclaim, What must I do to be saved! They no longer relish their former pursuits and pleasures. They loathe sin, and can never be reconciled to it again. Their cure engages all their solicitude. And, finding that there is a Saviour, and a great one, they are soon at his feet, crying, "Heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." How infinitely desirable and delightful does the Physician now appear! Who but He? They cheerfully put themselves under his care. They implicitly follow his orders. Their motto is, "If by any means." Their inquiry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" With what eagerness do they inquire after symptoms of cure! With what pleasure do they perceive and feel signs of returning health! "I bless God I have a little appetite for the bread of life—I have a little strength for spiritual exercises—Perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever—Forsake not the work of thine own hands."

NOVEMBER 10.

"I am the resurrection, and the life."
John xi. 25.

THERE is a spiritual resurrection and life, which all the subjects of divine grace derived from him. But here the sense is determined by the connexion. "Thy brother," said he to Martha, "shall rise again." But as he did not specify the time, she feared to apply the assurance to her present distress, or supposed that the consolation was to be drawn from the general resurrection. "Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." To excite her immediate hope, he reminds her of his own character and resources; and says, "*I* am the resurrection and the life." There must be a very peculiar relation between him and the resurrection of life, to justify the strength of this language. It may be exemplified in various illustrations.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he is the announcer of the doctrine. For it is a truth of pure revelation. Reason could never have discovered it. The men of wisdom at Athens, the Stoical and the Epicurean philosophers, however widely they differed from each other, agreed in deriding this sentiment; and deemed Paul a babbler for preaching it. How inexplicable the re-union, and re-animation of our scattered dust!—Where now are the bodies that trod the earth before the Flood! But even these bodies, through whatever changes they have passed, shall be restored and revived! Even Adam and Eve in their flesh shall see God, and be clothed in higher perfection than Eden ever knew! But *who* abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel? It is true that David, and even Job, rejoiced in the expectation of this glorious event; and many allusions and expressions in the Old Testament show, that the Jewish Church not only believed in a future state, but in the redemption of the body from the

grave. But the Book in which they are contained, is called, "the Word of Christ;" and the Spirit that testifieth these things, is called, "the Spirit of Christ." For as the sun scatters some light before his rising; so the Saviour commenced his discoveries before his incarnation: he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. But by-and-by he came in person and preached the kingdom of heaven. How simple and divine were his discourses! And with what an awful motive did he commend his doctrine to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He drew back the veil that hid the future, and presented the elements on fire, the opening tombs, and the dead rising to meet their Judge—"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." He also ordered his apostles to go forth and publish, and also record it; and they did so, the Lord working with them, and confirming their word with signs following.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he affords the pledge. Under each of the three distinguished periods of the world, the body as well as the soul had been received up into glory. Before the Flood, Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not, for God took him. The Law beheld Elijah elevated to heaven in a chariot of fire. In the days of the Gospel, Jesus Christ passed through the regions of the dead, and reached the crown that he now wears. And there is a union between him and his people. He is the head, and they are the members; and because he lives, they shall live also. Yea, says the Apostle, "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

He is the resurrection and the life, as he procures the privilege. To him we meritoriously owe all the blessings we possess. Are we justified and sanctified? In the Lord we have righteousness and strength. And are we raised from the dead? "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." He has redeemed our whole nature; and the body being ransomed, as well as the spirit, by no less a price than his own blood, shall be equally claimed, and renewed, and glorified.

He is the resurrection and the life, as he is the pattern. For we shall rise, not like Adam, but like Him. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." In his rising from the dead, we see the model of our own resurrection; and the grandeur of our own destiny. We imagine, says Paul, whatever is admirable and splendid in his glorified humanity; and we look for nothing less in ourselves—"We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." At present the body is vile: not as the workmanship of God; but as defiled by sin, as degraded by disease, and especially as the spoil of worms, in the corruption of the grave. What a hinderance! what a burden! what a loathsomeness is the body of this death! But then, by a change the most marvellous, it will have the same excellences as the body of God. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown in a natural body; it is raised in a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

He is the resurrection and the life, as he achieves the work. Hence he said to his hearers. "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." What a power will this require! But nothing is too hard for him. His almighty fiat will, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, pervade the depths of the sea; penetrate the recesses of the earth; and gather the remnants of death, and give them organization, and life, and sight, and voice—for ever!

Happy they who are the children of the resurrection: and who will be able to welcome the Restorer of all things—Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

For though, as an event, the resurrection will be universal; as a privilege, it will be limited. Every eye will see him. But how many will wail because of him!

NOVEMBER 11.

"*I rejoice in thy salvation.*"—1 Sam. ii. 1.

These are the words of Hannah, a very pious and highly accomplished female, to whom the Jews were so much indebted for one of their best public characters. For Sa-

muel was given in answer to her prayers; he was trained and formed by her instructions; and he was early dedicated to God, at the expense of her self-denial. She also edified her own generation, and she continues to edify ours, by her composition—"Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I REJOICE IN THY SALVATION."—Let us notice this part of her song, and let us take the subject in the highest sense of which it is susceptible. There are many salvations which God accomplishes. But there is one that excelleth in glory, and to which the term is pre-eminently, if not exclusively applied. In this salvation every believer rejoices.

He rejoices in the discovery of it. He is pained indeed to think that as yet multitudes of his fellow-creatures have never heard of it; and he prays that his way may be made known on earth, his saving health among all nations. But he is grateful that to him is the word of this salvation sent. There was a time, indeed, when he treated it with indifference; but when he began to see and feel his perishing condition; and to exclaim with the jailer, What must I do to be saved? he received this intelligence as Hagar did the angel's kindness, when he opened her eyes, and showed her a well: or as the Grecians heard the Roman Consul's proclamation of liberty; when they cried for hours, Soter, Soter—Saviour, Saviour!

He rejoices in the properties of this salvation. In the freeness of it—that it requires no qualifications, no conditions; and is without money, and without price. In the purity of it—that it not only contains pardoning mercy, but sanctifying grace; and is designed to save him from his sins, which he now feels to be his worst enemies. In the perpetuity of it—that he who begins a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; that he who believes *hath* everlasting life, and shall *never* come into condemnation. In the extensiveness of it—that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time; and that this salvation is prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.

He rejoices in the hope of it. This hope admits of various degrees, and the joy will be influenced by them. The lowest degree of it may serve to keep the mind from despair: as a weak bough will sustain a man drowning, till a firmer support comes to his relief. But there is a lively hope; there is an abounding in hope; there is the full assurance of hope—this will fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. In other cases thousands rejoice in hope, who will never obtain possession of the object of it. But the hope of Christians maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.

He rejoices in the experience of it. For he not only apprehends it as a desirable and future good; but he has a present actual participation of it. He feels the influence of it in his conscience, in his heart, in his life. And if a man be not saved on this side the grave, he will never be saved on the other. "We," says the Apostle, "who have believed, do enter into rest." And "Blessed," says David, "*is* the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

He rejoices in the completion of it. For though now he is enlightened, yet it is with the illumination of the dawn, not of the day. Though now he is sanctified, he is renewed but in part. Though justified and adopted, he does not always know his condition, and never enjoys all the privileges of it. He has the earnests, but not the inheritance. He has a few of the grapes of Eshcol, but does not yet command the vineyards of Canaan. But when that which is perfect shall come, then that which is in part shall be done away. In pursuit of which, he can say, with David, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is *fulness* of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be *satisfied*, when I awake, with thy likeness."

And yet the enemy of souls tells the young that religion is an utter enemy to enjoyment! Yet the world supposes that Zion is the metropolis of gloom and sadness. But, "as well the singers as the players on instruments are *there*." And they who have made the trial know that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. And the God of truth has said—"Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." Christians have a thousand things to rejoice in; but this is the chief, *the salvation of God*. And there is enough in *this* to inspire joy in the midst of every loss and trial. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

NOVEMBER 12.

"*So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange God with him.*"—Deut. xxxii. 12.

CONSISTENCY is a quality which a writer

finds it no easy thing to maintain, when he brings forward a character. The higher, and the more peculiar, and the more original the character be, the more is the difficulty increased. But when God is introduced, the difficulty becomes supreme. For, "to whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." From their knowledge of the general principles of their nature, which are the same in all, men may, with tolerable accuracy, speak of men; and describe how an individual would act in a given relation or condition. But for men to speak of God; and so represent him in all his attributes and actions, as that nothing shall fall short of an infinitely perfect Being: is what never would have been accomplished without inspiration. But we find this in the Scriptures; because holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And hence, though the sacred writers bring God forth in every page; we may almost say, in every sentence; he always appears in character; that is, in character with himself.

One thing however must be admitted—and it is by no means inconsistent with this—that, in the revelation with which we have been favoured, God has conformed himself to our modes of apprehension and expression. This was necessary, to render him at once intelligible and impressive. This therefore shows us not only his wisdom, but condescension; and dignity is never degraded by condescension. Thus he speaks unto us, as unto children, with whom imitation is every thing; and levies a tax upon all the world of nature, to furnish images of himself.

There is no relation he so commonly assumes as the parental. Nor need we wonder at this, when we consider that there is combined in it every thing at once venerable and endearing—that it appeals to the present sympathies of the heart—and aids our devotion by means even of our very instincts. And observe how he assumes it. Sometimes he takes the affection of the father: and we read —"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"—"I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Sometimes he appropriates the tenderness of the mother: and we read—"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." At other times he descends lower; and borrows from the animal, and especially the feathered tribes: and we read "He shall cover thee with his feathers; and under his wings shalt thou trust"—"How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye would not"—"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Observe a Divine agency—the *Lord led him.* The allusion is to the Jews: and the meaning is, that God conducted them in their journeyings to Canaan. They were very numerous: but the aggregate of them all was to Him like an infant. "I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt." "He led them by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." "He led them about, he instructed them, he kept them as the apple of his eye."

"See also the exclusive application of this work—"The Lord *alone* did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." The idols of the heathen were acknowledged to be limited in their powers. None of them could do every thing: there were therefore lords many, and gods many. There was a god for every exigency: a god for the sea—a god for the winds—a god for the field—a god for the garden—a god for marriage—and a god for war. But, said the Church, "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased." And he himself said, "O Israel! the Lord thy God is one Lord." *He* wrought out every deliverance for them. *He* conferred every blessing upon them—and, having done the work without any helper, he deserved all the praise; and assigns this as a reason why they should not divide their regards between him and any other. "*I* removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in trouble, and *I* delivered thee; *I* answered thee in the secret place of thunder: *I* proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god."

He is also a resemblance of the manner in which it was performed—"*So* the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." How! "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."

All this is not to be confined to the Jews. There is also a spiritual Israel, whom they were intended to prefigure; the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. And such a people he now has for his name; and he is leading them; leading them alone, without any one to divide with him the work, or share with him the glory. And how does he this? Let us not torture the image; but let us improve it. Three things are here ascribed to the mother-eagle—not in providing for her young; for this is not the subject in question—but in educating them; in teaching them to fly. She stirreth up her nest. She fluttereth over her young. She spreadeth abroad her wings, and taketh them, and beareth them on her wings. And all this is applicable to God, in his dealings with us, and

preparing us to seek those things that are above.

NOVEMBER 13.

"*As an eagle stirreth up her nest.*"
Deut. xxxii. 11.

—She sees the eaglets nestling, blinking, and dozing; and she wishes them to fly—Arise, says she—but they refuse—She then stirs up the nest—shakes it; turns out the inside; separates, scatters the parts. That is, she either destroys the nest, or makes it so uncomfortable that the young ones move out upon the neighbouring boughs, where they are in a posture for flight. God does the same with us—He stirs up our nest.

First. As to our outward condition in the world. This was the case with the Jews. Egypt had been their abode; where, in the infancy of their state, they were lodged like birds in a nest; and though it was an impure one, and much straitened and confined them, they evinced no care to leave it. And it is easy to see, that if they had been well treated, and enjoyed the smiles of the government and the former advantages of Goshen, Moses might have called long enough before they would have come out. But there arose another king, that knew not Joseph, who evil entreated them, and made their lives bitter by reason of cruel bondage. Their burdens were intolerable; their tasks impracticable; their complaints were turned into insults; their daughters were for slaves; and their sons for slaughter—And now they sigh for deliverance; and are willing to go forth, even into a wilderness, at the Divine call—Thus God stirred up their nest. Manasseh was the son of good Hezekiah: but every pious principle of his education was corrupted by power, wealth, and pleasure. He became proverbial for wickedness; and would have gone on till he had filled up the measure of his iniquity—But God stirred up his nest. "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." What brought the Prodigal to his senses, and made him think of home! A mighty famine in the land—he began to be in want. How many, now living, can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted: before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word!" *You* had health: but sickness invaded your frame; and you have been made to possess months of vanity, and have had wearisome nights appointed for you. *You* prospered in business: but your purposes were broken off; your schemes failed; you were put back in life, and compelled to begin the world afresh. *You* had a wife of your bosom: but the Lord took away the desire of your eyes with a stroke. *You* had a favourite child, on whom you placed many a flattering expectation: but at an early grave you sighed, "Thou destroyest the hope of man"—and now, at your meals, you see David's seat is empty—and you often retire, and sigh, "Childhood and youth are vanity." And what is all this but his stirring up your nest? and, by a sad, but salutary necessity, constraining you to turn from time to eternity; from the creature to Himself, the supreme good? And what a mercy, if you can *now* say—

"*Now* to the shining realms above,
I stretch my hands, and glance mine eyes:
Oh for the pinions of a dove,
To bear me to the upper skies!
"There, from the bosom of my God,
Oceans of endless pleasure roll:
There would I fix my last abode,
And drown the sorrows of the soul."

Secondly. As to our self-righteous confidence and security. We have naturally a good opinion of ourselves; and the enemy of souls loves to cherish it. He therefore keeps his palace and his goods in peace. He dreads a stir in the conscience. He knows that we must be humbled before we are exalted; wounded before we can be healed; and be emptied of self, before we can be filled with all the fulness of God. This state of mind must therefore be disturbed and destroyed before any thing like genuine religion can commence. And what does God? By the conviction of sin, like a general at the head of an army, he enters the soul—and the man no more says, Peace, peace—his hopes are fled—he is reduced to self-despair—and his only cry is, "What must I do to be saved?" His worldly friends are alarmed for him: but they who know what is the way of the Spirit rejoice, not that he is made sorry, but that he now sorrows after a godly sort. And the subject of the change himself may mistake the nature and design of the operation; and conclude that he is going to be destroyed. But if the Lord had a mind to kill him he would not have shown him such things as these. Thus it was with Paul. See how his nest was feathered with self-righteousness; and see how it was stirred up—"I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

Thirdly. As to our departure from life. We are not to remain here always; and it is no little difficulty to break up our attachment to the present state; and to make us willing to leave it. But see how this is done.—After a number of years we have a feeling persuasion that this is not our rest; that creatures are broken reeds; that the earth is a vale of tears; that the world is vanity and vexation

of spirit; and having looked through every scene here, we wish for another and a nobler region of existence. Then, too, our powers begin to fail us. Pains and infirmities grow upon us. Our decaying senses shut us out by degrees from former objects and pursuits. The days are come wherein we have no pleasure. Hearing fails. They that look out of the window are darkened. Fear is in the way. The grasshopper is a burden. And when we look around, where now are the relations and friends that once rendered life delightful? Lover and friend God has put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. We seem more and better related to another world than this—We feel the drawings of those who are gone—"What have I here? and what do I here?"—And now the hope of usefulness ceases to detain us. How can I glorify God! or serve my generation? Why should I remain a cumberer of the ground, when so many fine and fruitful trees are cut down? And now we become better acquainted with the heavenly world we have more nearly approached—O what darkness here! and what sunshine there! What bondage here! and what liberty there!—There no law in the members warring against the law of the mind—There no complaint, when I would do good evil is present with me—Is not this worth dying for!—Then the earnests and foretastes of the glory to which we are going render every thing else comparatively insipid; and the grapes of Eshcol make us long for the vineyards of Canaan—And thus the Lord stirs up the nest of life itself; and gets the heir of immortality upon the perch for his departure—where he is able to say,

> "There is a house not made with hands,
> Eternal and on high;
> And here my spirit, waiting, stands
> Till God shall bid it fly."

NOVEMBER 14.

"*Fluttereth over her young.*"—Deut. xxxii. 11.

—This she does to excite and teach them by her own example. And God does the same with regard to us. The eye does much more than the ear. The advantage derivable from example is universally allowed. It not only aids in the illustration of a subject, but also in the impression and influence of it; as it helps the memory, strikes the fancy, reproves indolence, encourages hope, and fires zeal. Wise teachers will therefore always teach as much as possible by example.

How sad is the state of those who are destitute of this advantage in religion! And there are those to be found who have scarcely an instance of godliness within their reach. We pity the son who has indeed a father who instructs him, and by his own example too—but it is to swear; to profane the Sabbath; to despise the house of God. We pity the daughter who has indeed a mother who leads her, and by her own example too—but it is to idolize her person; to read novels and romances—not the words of eternal life; to repair to places of dissipation—not to the throne of the heavenly grace. Is there an individual perusing this page, who is stationed in a neighbourhood, or a family, where he can find no one with whom he can unite in any religious exercise; who moves on alone; and even, perhaps, through reproach and opposition? Let him remember that this may not be the case always. If he walks in wisdom towards them that are without, his endeavours, in time, may be available; and his prayers be heard: and though he has been denied the advantage of *having* an example, he may have the honour of *becoming* one, and of leading others into the way everlasting.

But there are few places now in which there are not some instances of divine grace, sufficient to condemn the world, and to encourage those whose faces are Zionward. Some, perhaps, have many godly persons around them, and they see how superior these are to other men. How content! How grateful! How supported in trouble! How hopeful in death! Some have pious friends and relations. You have, perhaps, a sister, who often entreats you. Or a wife, who endeavours to win you. Or a father, who says, My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Or a mother, who weeps over you, and exclaims, What, my son! and the son of my womb! and the son of my vows! And what is all this but God teaching and exciting you? And if you can read, you have an additional advantage. How many excellent lives have been published? How many fine characters are pourtrayed in the Scriptures! And, by the perusal of all these, you bring a cloud of witnesses and examples before you. And when you see them in the exercise and display of whatsoever is lovely and of good report, do you not see God in all this, like the eagle, fluttering over her young!

But look at him in his more personal conduct. See how he not only teaches and excites by his word, but by his own example. Does he command us to be merciful? He is merciful; rich in mercy; he delighteth in mercy. Does he enjoin us to give! He daily loadeth us with his benefits. He gives us richly all things to enjoy. He spared not his own Son. Does he require us to forgive! He is ready to pardon. He abundantly pardons. "Love your enemies," says he; "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and

on the unjust." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This is not an optional thing with us; we *must* resemble him; and are only religious, in proportion as we are like him, and are one spirit with him.

To render his example the more engaging, we were going to say—he humanized it. God was manifest in the flesh. And this rendered his example, not only the more attractive, but even the more complete. For it is obvious that he could not have been our example, and have gone before us in the exercise of any of those graces, or the performance of any of those duties, which imply dependence, submission, and suffering, unless he had become incarnate. The Word, therefore, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Divine goodness walked up and down the earth for three-and-thirty years, in human form. Here was visible the image of the invisible God. The Sovereign comes down and goes before his subjects, to excite and allure them. See, says he; I obey, to teach you to obey—I suffer, to teach you how to suffer—I die, to make you fearless of death—"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ hath also loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour."

Let ministers learn from hence to be parental rather than magisterial; and to do more by influence than authority—"Neither as being lords over God's heritage; but being ensamples to the flock." This is what Paul enjoined on his son Timothy: "Be thou an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." And what was his own practice? "As ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

And let parents remember this image. Do as well as teach. Be amiable. Render your religion inviting. Let your children *see* it. Come near them—attach them—draw them.

> "And as the bird each fond endearment tries,
> To tempt her new-fledged offspring to the skies;
> Employ each *art;* reprove each dull delay;
> *Allure* to brighter worlds, and *lead* the way."

NOVEMBER 15.

"—*Spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.*"—Deut. xxxii. 11.

THIS is to aid, and also to secure them. When they mount her back, they are little aware of her design; but she sails away with them—and sometimes, shakes them off. Then they must fly themselves—But she follows after—She hovers near them: and when their pinions flag, and they are unable to keep longer on the wing, with surprising speed and skill, she darts and places herself underneath them; and thus receiving their whole weight, she prevents their fall, succours their weakness, and refreshes them for another flight. The Lord never entirely leaves his people—and it is well he does not: for without him they can do nothing. He does, however, in a degree withdraw from them, to make them more sensible of their weakness, and induce them to rely more upon himself: but not so as to hazard their safety—Thus the mother, when her infant, beginning to walk, is too venturesome, leaves him alone—not to go over a plank across a river; but in the room with her; and upon the carpet; where the fall will alarm and caution—not kill, or fracture him—And she soon takes him up, and presses him to her bosom and her lips again. God has himself (how much we need to teach and effect us!) employed another tender image. When young and feeble, the day perhaps warm, and the ground rough, the little lambs are unable to keep pace with the flock, and would be left panting and bleating behind: but the Shepherd of Israel gathers them with his arm, and carries them in his bosom.

Many are not convinced of their weakness, because they have never made, in earnest, a trial of their strength. But when a man begins to apply himself to the purposes of the divine life, he feels how unable he is to do any thing as of himself: and he would never be induced to take one step, effectually, in a religious course, without such an assurance as the Gospel presents. Possibility, probability, is not enough: he must hear the voice that cries, "My grace *is* sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And he does hear this. And, though much is required and expected of him, he sees all the means necessary to the end. He sees a cause more than adequate to the effect. It is a great thing to be a Christian: but "OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD."

He has said, "I will strengthen them in the Lord:" and, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." He aids them by his providence. And by communion with each other. And in the ordinances of religion. Ministers are "helpers of their joy. His word quickens them. His statutes help them. In the holy assemblies, and at the table of their dying Lord, while they wait upon him, he renews their strength; and they mount up with wings, as eagles; and they run, and are not weary; and they walk, and are not faint. But all these are only the means—the Holy Spirit is the agent—Not by might, nor

by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord. Our dependence upon him is entire. We pray in the Spirit. We live in the Spirit. We walk in the Spirit. He leads us into all truth. He seals us unto the day of redemption. But for his influence, who would not every moment despond and sink?

But the eagle, by taking and bearing her young on her wings, not only sustains and supports them, but protects and secures them. Is an enemy in sight! She soars with them above his reach. Does the archer discharge his arrows from below! They must pierce through her body before they can touch them. "The path of life is above, to the wise, to depart from hell beneath." And God is the refuge, as well as the strength, of his people. And to each of them he says, what David said to Abiathar, when he fled to him from the slaughter of Saul—"Abide with me; fear not; for he that seeketh thy life, seeketh my life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." When they can realize this, their soul dwells at ease. This is sometimes their privilege: it ought to be always their experience. Their security is always the same: but Paul was *persuaded* of it—"I am *persuaded*," says he, "that neither death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

NOVEMBER 16.

"*Thy hidden ones.*"—Psalm lxxxiii. 3.

This representation of God's people is worthy our notice. It may be taken two ways.

First. As referring to their safety. We often hide, only to preserve. This is the meaning of the word in the parable, with regard to the discovery of the treasure in the field; "which, when a man hath found, he hideth it." His aim is not to conceal, but to secure: and the cause is put for the effect. Thus God's people are hidden. He hid Noah in the Ark, and the waters that drowned the world, could not *find* him. When his judgments were coming over the land, "Come, my people," said He, "enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thee also for a little season, until the indignation be overpast." Hence the promise, "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Hence the confidence expressed by David, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock." The Saviour could say, "In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me." And, "All the saints are in his hand." They are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.—For He himself is their "refuge;" their "hiding-place"—They are his hidden ones.

Secondly. As intimating their concealment. This is not absolute. But it holds in various respects and degrees. It is true with regard to the nature of their spiritual life. Our life, says the Apostle, is hid with Christ in God: and that he refers to its invisibleness, rather than to its safety, is obvious from the words following: "When he who is our life shall *appear*, *we* also shall *appear* with him in glory." The source, principles, and actings, of this life, are unintelligible to natural men; neither can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The heart of the believer only feels his own bitterness: and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. The manna upon which he feeds, is hidden manna. And no one knoweth the new name in the white stone given him, but the receiver. His grief is too deep to be noisy. He sitteth alone and keeps silence. The stricken deer leaves the herd. Other warriors appeal to the senses, and get fame: but his conflicts are carried on within, visible to God only; and his laurels are all future. Others may give alms, to be seen of men: but his left hand is not to know what his right hand doeth.

They are sometimes hidden by persecution. For though this does not prevent their being Christians, it hinders them from appearing as such; especially by secluding them from their social and public assemblies. This is not our case. Our teachers are not put into a corner. We can go to the house of God in company. We can feed in the ways; and our pasture is in all high places. But call to remembrance the former times, when they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth; or were confined in prisons; or prayed and preached under the cover of night. But they were dear to God, they were *his* hidden ones.

They are sometimes hidden by the obscurity of their stations. Not many of the wise, and mighty, and noble, are called: but when they *are* called, they are also *exhibited*. They are like cities set on hills, which cannot be hid. A little religion in high life goes a great way, and is much talked of, because it is so often a strange thing. But God hath chosen the poor of this world; and they are often rich in faith. Yet how is their moral wealth to be known! How few opportunities have they for religious display or exertion! There may be the principle of benevolence, where there is no ability to give. And the Lord seeth the heart; but men can only judge

from actions. Many who are great in the sight of the Lord are living in cottages and hovels; and are scarcely known, unless to a few neighbours equally obscure.

They are sometimes hidden by their disposition. They are reserved; and shrink back from notice. They are timid and self-diffident. This restrains them in religious conversation, especially as it regards their own experience. This keeps them from making a profession of religion, and joining a Christian Church. Joseph of Arimathæa was a disciple of Jesus; but secretly, for fear of the Jews. And Nicodemus, from the same cause, came to Jesus by night. They had difficulties in their situations, from which others were free. They ought to have overcome them; and so they did at last: but it was a day of small things with them at first. Others are circumstanced and tried in a similar way; and we must be patient towards all men.

They are sometimes hidden by their infirmities. We would not plead for sin; but grace may be found along with many imperfections. The possessors have what is essential to religion in them; but not every thing that is ornamental, and lovely, and of good report.

The same also will apply to errors. Here, again, we are far from undervaluing divine truth. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. But it is impossible for us to say how much ignorance, and how many mistakes, may be found, even in the Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. How little did Peter know of the most important of all subjects, when our Saviour pronounced him blessed; and said he was a partaker of divine illumination! We extend this even to congregations and communities. There may be individuals in them, wiser than their teachers, and no strangers to communion with the God of all grace. Who can entertain too bad an opinion of Popery? Yet we find a Nicol, a Pascal, a Fenelon, in that most corrupt church—Where may not God have his hidden ones? Let us not judge of the real number of his people, by things that do appear. While we ought to pray always —"The Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundredfold." It is not only candour, but truth, that tells us we may enlarge our hopes: while we ought to pray always. "Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal."

NOVEMBER 17.

"*His seed shall endure for ever.*"
Psalm lxxxix. 36.

David was peculiarly related to the Messiah. He wrote much concerning him. He yielded the most varied and complete type of him ever exhibited. He was at once his Lord and his son. Hence the name of the former is often applied to the latter; and what is spoken of the one, is often to be extended to the other. It *must* be so applied, to do any thing like justice to the force of the language. And in this case we are more than justified, by numerous appropriations of men in the New Testament, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Upon this principle, the words before us insure the perpetuation of his people—"His seed shall continue for ever." We shall say nothing of their number; though, if we were asked the question, "Are there few that shall be saved?" we could boldly answer, No! Ignorance and bigotry have always diminished them; but they shall be found, when gathered together, a countless multitude.

But why are they called his *seed?* Because they derive their being, as new creatures, from him. "Every one that doeth righteousness, is born of Him." In such a relation, we look for resemblance. This, indeed, is not invariably the case, with regard to children. Some of them have little of the father's likeness, either in features or in temper. But all Christians resemble Christ. They bear the image of the heavenly. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. The relation infers duty. It does away, indeed, with all servileness; but not with service. "A seed shall serve him." "And I will spare them," says he, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." "A son honoureth his father." Every Christian, therefore, will ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The relation confers honour. His seed are descended from One who is higher than the kings of the earth; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and whose holiness and goodness are infinite. Such honour have all his saints.

But what a privilege does it bespeak! There is an amazing instinct in brute-creatures towards their offspring. It seems to transform the very nature of some of them. The timid sheep, and the fearful bird, become bold and daring on behalf of their young. As to man, if *he* were not to provide for his own, he would be contemned by all around him: and were he a pretender to religion, he would be considered as denying the faith, and be deemed worse than an infidel. Will the Lord Jesus neglect *his* offspring? Will he suffer them to want any good thing? Will he not educate

them? Chastise them? Resent every injury that is done them! Acknowledge them! Defend them?

Observe, not only their relation to him, but their perpetuity—"They shall continue for ever." They die, as well as others: they often die earlier: yet, consistently with this obvious and undeniable fact, they shall continue for ever, in three senses. First. In the succession of their race to the end of the world. It will never be cut off—"The Church in danger!" *What* Church? "Upon this rock," says he, "I will build *my* Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Yea, his people shall continue to increase in number and excellency—*We* shall leave the world better than we entered it: and so will our *children*—till Jerusalem shall be established, and be made a praise in the whole earth. Secondly. In their religious character to the end of life. If left to themselves, we could not be sure of their persevering to the end of a day, or an hour. But they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. He upholdeth them with his hand. They shall hold on their way. In all their dangers they shall be more than conquerors. —Thirdly. In their glorified state, through eternal ages. The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever. All other greatness is only for life: it is frequently less durable—at death, it *ends*. But *then*, the Christian's greatness—I will not say begins; for it began the moment he prayed—but then it continues —increases—but is perfected. Death only affects one part of him: the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. And even the body shall be revived and improved—and made like the Saviour's own glorious body—and be as immortal as the soul. Every thing here is variable, fading, perishing—

> "All, all on earth, is shadow; all beyond,
> Is substance—the reverse, is Folly's creed—
> How solid all, where change shall be no more!"

—Where we shall have, not only endless existence, but endless existence beatified. Where, if we have treasure, moth and rust will not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Where, if we have a house, it will not be a house made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. Where, if we have a crown of glory, it fadeth not away. Where, if we have friendships, we shall part no more. Where we shall be FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

NOVEMBER 18.

"*Open thy mouth wide.*"—Psalm lxxxi. 10.

THOUGH we cannot find out God, perfectly, in his essence or his works, we are not left in total ignorance concerning him. We have all the information our duty and our consolation can require. Though he be a God that hideth himself, yet he is the God of Israel, the Saviour. He has been pleased to reveal himself as the hearer of prayer—Yea more—as exciting it—as encouraging it—as concerned for the enlargement of our desires in the performance of it—"Open thy mouth wide."

To aid us herein, Let us consider his greatness and all-sufficiency. We should expect more from a prince than from a pauper. Many have benevolence without resources; and in vain we address them: they may grieve to deny us, but they cannot relieve. When the woman cried, "Help, O king!" he said, "Whence should I help thee?" But we kneel before One, whose greatness is unsearchable; who is Lord of all. His giving a world, would be less than our giving a crumb of bread. When Alexander had bestowed a very valuable present on a poor man, his modesty would have declined it: "It is too much," said he, "for me to receive"—"But," said the conqueror, "it is not too much for me to give." God gives like himself; and he is to be addressed in character with himself. We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Is it comfort we want? He is the God of all comfort. Is it deliverance? Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Is it renovation? He can make all things new—He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

Let us consider his goodness. Nothing tends to contract us more than a sense of our unworthiness. We ought to feel this: but we ought not to be discouraged by it; since he is the God of all grace, the Father of mercies; since he is rich in mercy, and delighteth in mercy. We are not to judge of him by a human standard. It is an injury to us, when we are applying to him, to think of the benevolence of the most generous of our fellow-creatures. They all come inconceivably short of his glory. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And the reference here, is to his thoughts and ways of mercy; and especially pardoning mercy.

Let us remember, also, the medium through which we implore his favours. We have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of him: we have boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus; having such an High Priest over the house of God, we draw near in full assurance of faith. In saving and glorifying us, through the Son of his love, we do not ask God to deny his truth; or dishonour his name; or trample upon his law—Yea, he magnifies his law in doing it. He declares

his righteousness. While he redeems Jacob, he glorifies himself in Israel: and glory to God in the highest, is combined with peace on earth, and good-will towards men. Let us think of this; and ask, and receive, that our joy may be full—Whatsoever, said he, ye shall ask the Father, in my Name, he will do it.

Review, also, the manner in which he has answered the prayers of his people. Has he ever refused them! Has he ever given sparingly? Jacob asked for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a return in peace to his father's house: and, lo! he becomes two bands! Solomon asked for a wise and understanding heart: and he obtained, not only wisdom, but life, and riches, and honour! Abraham left off asking, with regard to Sodom, before God left off giving. Why did he stop at ten? Had not God complied with every preceding proposal, without the least reluctance? But Abraham was ashamed—he had not courage to go on.

But is it not sufficient that he has commanded it? Having his authority, you cannot be chargeable with presumption, if you ask much. Yea, you will be guilty of rebellion, if you refuse. How did he punish the guests who refused the invitation to the feast, "Come, for all things are now ready!"

Here is also an express assurance, a promise not only that we shall receive, but be filled—Open thy mouth wide, and "I will *fill* it." He will supply *all* our need from his riches in glory—He will bless us with *all* spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Where is the Christian who lives up to his duty? or to his privilege? For God not only answers prayer really, but proportionally—He says, "Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."

Let not him, therefore, who prays rarely and coldly, think to succeed like the frequent and fervent petitioner. Honour God, and God will honour you. He does not despise the day of small things. But "the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

NOVEMBER 19.

"*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*"
John ix. 35.

This question was addressed to a man that had been blind. Some are blind by accident, and some by disease; but this man was born blind. He had never seen even the face of her who bore him, and who, as she fed him at her breast, would often look upon him, and weep over her orbless boy. Blindness is always a sufficient affliction in itself: but here, poverty was added to it. Like others of the same class of sufferers, mentioned in the Gospels, he sat by the way-side, begging. Many had passed him, without notice: but Jesus had compassion on him. Some had given him alms—which was all he implored: but Jesus gave him eyes; and did for him beyond all that he could ask or think. The cure was notorious. The common people acknowledge it; and they brought the man to the Pharisees, supposing that *they* would be equally ready to confess it too. But see how the plainest truth can be perplexed or doubted, when it comes before those whose interest it is to deny or conceal it. First, they admit the fact; but turn it against our Saviour, because he had done it on the Sabbath-day. This did not satisfy the people, who justly remarked, that, had he violated the Sabbath, he would have been a transgressor; and God would not have thus honoured a sinner. Then they pretend to question the fact itself. They set aside the man's own testimony, and call in his parents. His parents affirm, that he was their son, and that he had been born blind; but, fearing lest they shoud be put out of the synagogue, they affect to be ignorant of the mode of his cure! How stubborn is truth! How hard is it to suppress evidence! The attempt is like trying to keep fire under ashes out in the wind. Again they call in the man himself; and, after an artless relation, which they could not resist; and an involuntary address, which they could not endure; "they cast him out"—that is, they drove him from their presence, and excommunicated him as a member of the Jewish synagogue. Informed of this, Jesus sought, and found him—and said unto him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

There are many foolish and useless questions asked by every individual. In the company of some persons we are in a perfect inquisition: we are tortured with inquiries concerning every body, and every thing. It would be well if many professors of religion were aware, that they are accountable, not only for their time, but their tongues; and would remember the language of our Saviour —"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Many of the inquiries in the theological world, which have engrossed so much attention, and injured so much temper, have turned on subjects too deep to be fathomed, or too trifling to merit regard. When Peter, wishing to know his designs concerning John, asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" he replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." A man, in the road, asked, "Lord, are there few that shall be saved?" But Jesus "answered and said unto *them*," for he would not notice the trifler himself; but said unto *them* that were about him—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for I say unto you, that many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." If it be said, This was no answer to the question itself, we reply, That it *was* an

answer; and the only *proper* answer—an answer, by way of *rebuke*—an answer, informing *them*, and informing *us*—That "the secret things belong unto God; but things that are revealed are for us, and for our children"—and, That whatever be the number of the saved, we may be included in it, if we earnestly and immediately seek it.

But the question before us is founded in importance. We may infer this from the character of the inquirer: he never trifled, never spoke an idle word. And we may infer it, also, from the nature of the case itself. For what can be so important as faith in Christ? It is the principle of all religion. It is the only medium through which we can enjoy the blessings of the Gospel. Do we live? We "live by the faith of the Son of God." Do we walk? "We walk by faith." Do we stand? "By faith we stand." Do we conquer? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." There is no justification without it—"Being justified by faith." There is no sanctification without it—"Sanctified by faith that is in me." There is no consolation without it—"In whom, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." In a word, there is no salvation without it—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The same things, therefore, in the Scripture, which are ascribed to Christ, are also ascribed to faith. The reason is, because it is only by faith we can make use of Christ, for all the purposes which he is appointed to accomplish. It is only by faith we can receive him as the gift of God; enter him as a refuge; apply him as the balm of Gilead; and feed upon him as the bread of life.

And unless we believe on him, we not only incur the greatest loss we can incur, but we contract the greatest guilt we can contract. We disobey the express command of God—his dearest command; the command which involves all his glory in the highest degree—For "this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." We make him a liar. We throw unspeakable contempt upon his wisdom and goodness. He has, at an infinite expense, provided a Saviour, and brought him near, and pressed us to avail ourselves of him. And how can we contemn God so much as by making light of it, and rejecting it? "He that believeth not shall be damned." "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

What, then, can be so momentous as this question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And yet many never give it a serious thought. They can live on, year after year, without ever once inquiring, "Am I a believer, or an unbeliever?"—though their everlasting all depends upon it—though now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation—though their breath is in their nostrils—and they know that their only opportunity is as uncertain as it is short. Oh! the deceitfulness of sin! Oh! the madness of sinners! Oh! the influence of the god of this world, who blindeth the minds of them that believe not!

NOVEMBER 20.

"*Did I not see thee in the garden with him.*"
John xviii. 26.

While within my garden roving,
And my senses all are fed;
Rising from these lov'd attractions,
I'm to nobler subjects led:
Other gardens
Here, in musings, oft I tread.

First, I enter *Eden's* garden,
Yielding pain, and profit, too;
Adam, here, while sinless standing,
Nought of fear, or sorrow knew:
But what changes
Did from his offence ensue!

Then, with hope and joy reviving,
To *Gethsemane* I go;
And approach, in that dread garden,
Jesus bearing all my wo:
From his anguish
All my ease and safety flow.

In the Garden *where they laid him*,
With the Marys there I sit;
Weeping, till I see him rising,
And embrace his pierced feet:
King of Terrors,
Now I can thy frownings meet!

In the *Church*, the *Saviour's* garden—
Trees, and plants, and flowers, I see;
Guarded, water'd, train'd, and cherish'd,
Blooming immortality:
All transplanted
From thy soil, O Calvary!

But, above all gardens precious,
See *the Heavenly Paradise:*
There the Tree of Life is bearing;
There the springs of glory rise:
And the richness
Every want and wish supplies.

There, the foot no thorn e'er pierces;
There, the heart ne'er heaves a sigh;
There, in white, we walk with Jesus;
All our lov'd connexions by:
And, to reach it,
'Tis a privilege to die!

NOVEMBER 21.

"*Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*"
2 Kings xiii. 14.

Elijah was spared the common doom of mortality, and was taken to heaven, in a chariot and horses of fire, without dying. But Elisha, who had honoured God so much

longer, goes the way of all the earth. Why was this difference? Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

But he does not die of natural infirmity. Neither does he die suddenly—He had fallen sick. This mode of dissolution was less desirable, with regard to comfort; but it was more favourable to usefulness. It afforded him opportunity for glorifying God, and instructing and impressing his attendants. And "the chamber where the good man meets his fate," has often been to others, as well as to the dying individual himself, the house of God, and the gate of heaven. We are therefore glad to find Joash, the king of Israel, with Elisha in this situation. Such a scene is generally very uninviting to persons in the upper ranks of life. They love not, in the midst of flattery and dissipation, to be reminded of the days of darkness. Yet "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." It is more serious, and more soft.

But who was this Joash? "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. He departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein." Who would have looked for such a man here? Yet see the trouble he takes. He does not send to inquire after the dying prophet, but personally visits him. See his condescension and humility in entering "a little chamber on the wall, with a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick." See his tenderness, in hanging over the expiring saint, and weeping. See his knowledge of the value and importance of Elisha—"Ah! what shall I do, and what will my people do, when thou art gone?—My father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" How much like a pious man does Joash now appear! How little can we judge of men by particular conditions, events, and feelings! Who has not had powerful convictions! Who has not often exclaimed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his? Who has not, like Felix, trembled under the preaching of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come? Of whom has it not, in some period, been said, as it was of the young man in the Gospel, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God?

—What brings Joash here now? He had disregarded and despised Elisha before. But Elisha is now *going*. "How mercies brighten, as they take their flight?" How an undutiful child prizes a parent when he is following him to the grave! How many would listen to the voice of the preacher when they can hear him no more! Even the Jews, who so often would have stoned Moses, mourned for him many days.—Who would have thought that all these fine impressions would have worn off? But Joash leaves the dying room, and the honoured prophet, and enters ordinary life, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. The tempting scenes of greatness again seduce him; and his iniquities, like the wind, take him away! And who would have thought, that, after the wreck of all his worldly substance; or the loss of Joseph and Benjamin; or the taking away of the wife of his bosom with a stroke; or the awfulness of a disease that led him down to the gates of death, and induced him to cry, Oh! spare me a little longer!—who would have imagined, that—after such lessons—any man could turn again to folly, and walk more eagerly according to the course of this world! "O Ephraim!" says God, "what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

The devotion of natural men depends upon external excitement. They pour out a prayer when God's chastening hand is upon them: but they do not delight themselves in the Almighty; they do not always call upon God. The summer brook may by a storm be swelled into a flood; but, having no permanent source, it soon rolls off, and the bed is dry. A Christian's devotion may be aided by outward helps; but it does not depend upon them. His practice flows from principle: and he exemplifies the promise—"The water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." And "he only that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

NOVEMBER 22.

"*And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.*"—2 Kings xiii. 19.

Elisha was now on his dying bed; and being visited by Joash, the king of Israel, who was deeply affected with the interview; he gave him two orders, the one to shoot, and the other to smite. Both these were doubtless delivered under a prophetical impulse; and though they may seem strange to us, they were well understood by the parties.

—"And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance,

and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." The Romans were accustomed to declare war against an enemy by shooting an arrow into their territory. Alexander also did this when he entered Persia. This order, therefore, was an intimation of war. Accordingly, it was discharged "eastward;" that is, towards Syria. But the man of God arose while he held the bow, and put his left hand upon the king's left hand, and his right hand upon the king's right hand. For what purpose! Elisha was the representative of God, in whose name he now spake; and he thus teaches the king—that though he should use means, he should not depend upon them—that the excellency of the power was not of the weapons, but of God—and that, if his bow abode in strength, the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. It is therefore called the arrow of the *Lord's* deliverance; and by which the Syrians were to be vanquished in Aphek.

And is it not so with us? When we work, God must work with us. If his hand be not with us for good; what is our prudence, our resolution, our energy? "Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Thus the apostles went forth, preaching; and the "hand of the Lord was with them; and many believed and turned unto the Lord."

Again, he said, "Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." Joash was conscious that the action was a sign, or he could not have been blameable. The action, therefore, betrayed remissness, and lukewarmness: it was expressive of his disposition; and it indicated the event. He therefore showed that he was not willing to push the war to a complete issue; he was only for injuring and enfeebling the enemy he *might*, and *ought* to have *destroyed*. And so the prophet viewed it. He saw that he was half-hearted, and would not improve his advantages. He should have resembled David, who could say, "I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind; I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets." But Joash was more disposed to imitate Ahab, who, when Benhadad was delivered into his hand, suffered him to escape, and to recover his power and means of annoying again, in consequence of which, God said, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people."

Elisha, therefore, was offended with Joash. And was it not enough in such a case to grieve a man of God, burning with holy zeal for his cause? And is it not grievous to God's ministers now, when *we* are not strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? We have his promises and invitations; and we have the experience of his people, living and dying—all showing us how willing he is to help; and to make us more than conquerors. But, alas! we are satisfied with *little*—not in temporal things—where contentment is a virtue; but in spiritual things—where moderation is a crime.

Say not, Why, O why did not Joash continue smiting till the prophet said—"It is enough." Are not you chargeable with the very same offence? Are not you satisfied with slightly wounding your spiritual enemies, instead of breathing after an entire victory over them? Are not you disposed to live on a little corner of your estate, when there remains yet very much land to be possessed?

Look at your desires! Are they not formal and few? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness? Do your souls break for the longings they have unto God's judgments at all times? Do you open your mouth wide, that God may fill it? Do you pray, that according to the riches of his glory, he would strengthen you with might by his Spirit in the inner man? that you may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge? that you may be filled with all the fulness of God?

Look at your expectations! Are they not few and faint? Is your hope a lively hope? Is it vigorous enough to counteract the impressions of the world? Do you abound in hope? Does it bear any proportion to the exceeding great and precious promises?

Look at your exertions! Are they not few and languid? An occasional retirement—a hasty performance of private devotion—a formal service at the family altar—a forgetful hearing of the Word—without early rising—without self-denial—without taking up your cross—without *labouring* for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life—without *striving* to enter in at the strait gate—without *fighting* the good fight of faith—and taking the kingdom of heaven by force—O this vile moderation! This guilty relaxation! This smiting thrice only, instead of going forward, and deeming nothing done while any thing remains to be done!

Wherefore, "giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you

that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

NOVEMBER 23.

"*And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.*"—2 Kings xiii. 20, 21.

HERE we see the Moabites did not come in a large army, but in particular bands, to pillage and alarm. It shows us in how undefended a state, at this period, the country must have been. But what has this to do with the death and burial of Elisha? The one is mentioned in connexion with the other; and has a reference to the exclamation the king made in his dying chamber, "O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" And see, would the historian say, see how soon this began to be exemplified! Does this cause seem inadequate to the effect? Who has not observed the importance of individuality? When Goliath came forward challenging, all the army of Israel fled. What a terror was Samson to the Philistines! They could do nothing till they had got rid of him. There are persons who are the life, the soul of a party or a community. What enterprizes for the glory of God and the spread of the Gospel have originated from one Christian! The death of a minister has been the signal for the division and dispersion of a congregation raised by his talents and zeal—"I know," says Paul, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your ownselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

What is there peculiar here? The intimation of the historian is constantly and variously held forth in the Scripture at large. There we see the regard God pays to his people. "Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all."

"Oft have our fathers told,
Our eyes have often seen,
How well our God secures the fold,
Where his own sheep have been."

The ungrateful world despises them. Yet how much do even *they* owe to the presence and the prayers of the saints! By them blessings have been obtained or continued. They have withholden or removed judgments.—They have been the "healers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in." Shall not we love them? Shall not we pray for their increase?

But here was a thing very accidental, as to the persons employed. They were a funeral party, and were going to carry the corpse further; but seeing a number of their invaders, and wishing to make a timely escape, they hastily laid it in the grave of Elisha, which happened to be at hand. But how wonderful was the result! "When the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet!" Here the Papists come (and to what other place can they come so well?) to find something to favour the doctrine of relics. Which of their churches is not furnished with the supposed remains of saints?—Some of these saints too, were little better than dæmons. But, allowing them to have been real saints—what profit is there in their bones when they go down to the grave? The virtue here was not in the bones of Elisha, but in the power of God. And what a stupendous miracle was it! "Surely, had not the people been blind and impenitent, they must have been brought to repentance." So we think—but who said, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead!" Whether there were as yet any Sadducees in Israel we know not. If there were, they here saw a proof and an instance that the dead can be re-animated—and it matters not, as to the miracle of the fact, whether it took place two days after death, or two thousand years. God alone could have done it. And why should it be thought a thing incredible that *God* should raise the dead? *His* power is almighty: and we see what changes and revivals it is continually producing in nature. But with us the subject admits of no doubt—We believe (the Lord prepare us for it!) that "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust."

The fathers—where are they? and the prophets—do they live for ever? No. The dearest, the greatest, the most useful of his servants die. But "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. We are losers; but to them, to die is gain. They are privileged in it. They are privileged by it. And it is desirable to be near them, living, dying, and dead; in time, and in eternity "Gather not my soul with sinners." I would "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew·

saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you"—"Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

God can honour his servants after they are in their graves. The memory of the just is blessed—and useful too. Yes; you may be the means of awakening and enlivening persons after your death—not by quickening their mortal bodies; but their souls, which were dead in trespasses and sins: not by your bones; but by your example, which shall still operate; by your instructions, which shall still speak; by the prayers you offered; by the books you gave; by the minister you educated; by the place of worship you built, while you were yet living.

—Every thing should lead us to the Saviour. How much any of the Jews at this time knew of the Messiah we cannot ascertain. But *we* know, that because he died, we shall live. We know, that if we are planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. He made the grave his own, by residence and consecration—Behold the place where the Lord lay! Into this grave we must descend. But we shall arise from it, not only living, but immortal: not, like this man, to die again, but to die no more; death having no more dominion over us. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they rise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

NOVEMBER 24.

"*The righteous shall flourish.*"—Psalm xcii. 12.

Prosperity in the divine life is the Christian's duty—and therefore he is commanded to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. It is his desire—and hence he prays, Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. It is his privilege—and thus it is provided for, and secured by, Divine promise—"The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." David here tells us, that "the righteous shall flourish." And he tells us—

How he shall flourish—"He shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." Of the wicked he had said just before, "When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever." They flourish as the *grass*, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven. What a contrast, with the worthlessness, the weakness, transitoriness, and destiny of grass, in a warm country too—are the palm tree and the cedar in Lebanon! They are evergreens. How beautifully, how firmly, how largely they grow! How strong and lofty is the cedar! How upright, and majestic, and tall the palm tree—The palm also bears fruit called dates, like bunches of grapes. It sometimes yields a hundred weight at once.

He tells us *where* he shall flourish; "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." The allusion is striking. It compares the house of God to a garden, or fine well-watered soil, favourable to the life, and verdure, and fertility of the trees fixed there. The reason is, that in the sanctuary we have the communion of saints. *There* our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. *There* are dispensed the ordinances of religion, and the word of truth. *There* God commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength. Hence, from their own experience, as well as from the word of promise, they are increasingly induced to say with David—"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

He also tells us *when* he shall flourish—"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." This is to show the permanency of their principles—and to distinguish them from natural productions—

> "The plants of grace shall ever live;
> Nature decays, but grace must thrive:
> Time, that doth all things else impair,
> Still makes them flourish strong and fair."

—The believer does not escape all the effects of years. The eye may grow dim; the ear become dull of hearing. But as the outward man perisheth, the inward man is renewed day by day. The young Christian is lovely, like a tree in the blossoms of spring: the aged Christian is valuable, like a tree in autumn, bending with ripe fruit. We therefore look for something superior in old disciples. More deadness to the world, the vanity of which they have had more opportunities to see—more meekness of wisdom—more disposition to make sacrifices for the sake of peace—more maturity of judgment in divine things—more confidence in God—more richness of experience.

He also tells us *why* he shall flourish—"They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright." We might rather have supposed that it was necessary to show that *they* were upright. But by the grace of God they are what they are—not they, but the grace of God which is in them. From *him* is their fruit found. Their preservation and fertility, therefore, are to the praise and glory of God: and as what he does for them

he had *engaged* to do; it displays his truth as well as his mercy; and proves that he is upright. This cleaving also to him with purpose of heart, and not turning away from him, whatever temptations the world presents —shows that they have found him to be what he had given himself out to be, and what they had taken him to be. Had he deceived or disappointed them, they would have forsaken him. But he has always dealt well with them—he has surpassed their hopes. They therefore love their Master and his work—and are willing to follow him to prison or to death—to show that he is upright.

David, therefore, attests this from his own experience—"Let every one speak as he finds. I cannot but magnify his name. I cannot but recommend him to those who want a dependence that will not give way. I have tried him, and tried him much, and long. I never served him for nought. I never called upon him in vain. I never trusted in him, and was confounded—HE IS MY ROCK; AND THERE IS NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIM."

NOVEMBER 25.

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"
John ix. 35.

THE question concerns us, as well as the man who had been restored to sight. And it admits of solution. Indeed, the inquiry would be absurd if an answer were impossible. Some very mistaken notions are entertained of divine influence. One thing is undeniable. The grace of God, in renewing us, engages and employs us; so that we are not like wood and stone, under the operation of the saw and the chisel, merely passive, insensible, unconscious. God does not work upon us, but in us; and in us, to *will* and to *do* of his good pleasure. He is the author of repentance, by enabling *us* to exercise repentance—And cannot a man know whether he repents of any course or action in which he has been engaged? He is the giver of faith, as he teaches and aids *us* to believe. The faith, therefore, does not act in us like a charm. It is not a mysterious, unintelligible thing, of which we can give no account—We are always to be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us.

How then is an answer to be returned? Let us away with accidental occurrences, and dreams, and sudden impulses; and repair to the Scriptures at once; and, by their decisions, examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith, and prove our ownselves. Three evidences may be adduced of our believing on the Son of God.

First. Much anxiousness and uneasiness concerning it; in distinction from the temper of those who can readily and easily take it for granted. This is not the disposition of awakened souls. *They* find how hard it is to abound and rejoice in hope. This results from the importance and dearness of the object. It is not true that it is easy to believe what we wish—Yea, in proportion as we love and value a thing, we become the more apprehensive, and require every kind of proof and assurance concerning its safety. And here the case is interesting beyond all comparison—It is to ascertain my claims to everlasting life! What, if I should be mistaken! And my heart is deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked! And I learn, from the word of truth, that many are imposed upon to their remediless ruin! And what, if I am informed, but not enlightened!—convinced, but not converted!—almost, but not altogether a Christian! No wonder, in such a case, solicitudes often revive; and the prayer be daily made, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Let me not be ashamed of my hope. These doubts and fears are a token for good; and may be compared to smoke; which indeed is not fire, but proves its existence; and is never found where it is not.

Secondly. The estimation in which we hold the Saviour. Hence says the Apostle, "To you therefore that believe he is precious." He does not say how precious—this would have been impossible. But faith makes him more precious to the soul than sight is to the eye; or melody to the ear; or food to the hungry; or health and life to the sick and the dying. Oh! says the believer, when I see him as he is revealed in the Word—when I see him in all I want—when I see how he became my Saviour—that, when he was rich, for my sake he was made poor; and died, that I might live—when I know that he is remembering me still, now he is come into his kingdom; appearing in the presence of God for me; and making all things to work together for my good—how can I but exclaim, Thou art fairer than the children of men!—His name must be as ointment poured forth—His cause must lie near my heart—I must dedicate myself to his service. I must hourly ask, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

"My God! and can a humble child,
That loves thee with a flame so high,
Be ever from thy face exil'd,
Without the pity of thine eye?

"Impossible!—for thy own hands
Have tied my heart so fast to thee—
And in thy book the promise stands—
That where thou art, thy friends must be."

Thirdly. A life of obedience. Without this, an orthodox creed; the clearest knowledge; high confidence; much talking of divine things; great zeal for a party: will all in vain be called in to denominate you believers in Christ. Nothing can be more certain than that as a man is not wise who calls himself so, while all his conduct proclaims

him a fool; and as *he* is not a benefactor who never gives—unless, indeed, words: so, *he* is not a believer who thinks and professes himself to be such; but he who acts and lives as such. We read of the work of faith—Where is this operation? By faith Noah built an ark. By faith Abraham left his own country, and his father's house. Read the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews; and see whether faith is a mere notion, or a vital principle. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can such faith save him?" Therefore says James, "Show me thy faith without thy works." Show me a sun that never shines; a fire that never burns; a fountain that never flows—"and I will show thee my faith by my works"—I will show thee the spring in the streams; the cause in the effects; the principle in the practice. Though faith can alone justify the soul; works can alone justify faith, and prove it to be of the operation of God.

NOVEMBER 26.

'My people—have forgotten their resting-place."—Jer. l. 6.

God has provided every creature he has made with some convenient good, in the possession of which it reposes. Natural bodies have their proper places, towards which they are carried, and declare, by resting in them, that they are where they ought to be. Sensitive beings are led towards sensitive, and animal beings towards animal indulgence, as agreeable to their nature; and these look no farther. But God himself is the resting-place of man: and it has justly been remarked, that herein lies man's excellency; that he alone, of all creatures in this lower world, was made capable of communion with his Maker; and designed for it; and being designed for it, and made capable of it, he is necessarily unsatisfied and restless without it. For though he has been turned away from God by sin, he retains the same natural relation to God as his end; so that he can enjoy no true repose, till he meets with God again. He feels not only sentiments of misery, but of grandeur; and whatever may be employed to quiet and content him, will be found perfectly inadequate; and from every fruitless experiment to supply the immense cravings of a fallen, yet immortal mind, he will ever be asking. "Who will show us any good?"

There was a time when the "people of God" themselves attempted to live without him in the world. But they were dead while they lived. They were strangers to every thing like satisfaction, till they happily inquired, "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" But since they sought and found him, they have been able to make their boast in the Lord—"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." *He*, therefore, is "*their* resting-place" actually; and by conviction; and choice; and enjoyment. And what a resting-place is he! There is no repose like that which we possess in him—It is a peace that passeth all understanding. How then can it be described! Who can express the blessedness of viewing him as our own God, in the covenant of his dear Son—ready to pardon—able to enlighten, to renew, to support, to defend—presiding over all our affairs, and making the most adverse events conduce to our welfare—and promising, on oath, that his grace shall be sufficient for us; and that he will supply all our need from his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus! All we can do is to invite others to come, and learn (it is the only way to know) by experience—"O taste and see that the Lord is good! blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Incomparable as this resting-place is, it is equally secure and durable. Nothing can destroy it; nothing can injure it; nothing can invade it. We live in the midst of uncertainty and change; but the Lord changes not. There is therefore something sure; something lasting—It is that very one thing, O Christian! upon which thou hast laid all thy hope; and from which thou drawest all thy comfort—The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms.

And yet they are charged with *forgetting* their resting-place. The charge cannot be taken without limitation. As fainting is not death; and as backsliding is not apostacy; so this forgetfulness is not constant and total. But it cannot be denied that it is occasional and partial. Our ingratitude shows it. This is at once the effect and the proof of our forgetfulness of God; and is therefore expressed by it—"Thou hast forgotten the God that formed thee." It sometimes appears with regard to the means of grace. In proportion as we feel our need of *him*, we shall value *them;* because it is in these that God is to be found and enjoyed—Hence it is said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." But we may read the Scriptures less than we did—and be less alone—and less regardful of the Sabbath—and suffer excuses to keep us from the sanctuary that once would have had no influence over us. It shows itself in our looking to ourselves for what we want; when in the Lord we have righteousness and strength; and from him is our fruit found.

We betray it in our creature dependence. Instead of committing our way unto the Lord, and waiting patiently for him, we weary ourselves for very vanity, in running from creature to creature for help; and learn, by our folly and suffering, that our strength is to sit still: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."—And do we not forget him when we faint in the day of adversity? "Oh!" says one, "if such a comfort was removed, mine eye would no more see good." "Oh!" says another, "my loss is irreparable; my wound is incurable." We do not wish you to be insensible, or to undervalue your deprivations: but is it a lamp, or the sun, of which you have been deprived? David, in the desolations of Ziklag, did not forget his resting-place—"Then David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Our regard to the world will also show our regard to God. We forget him just in proportion as the world strikes and allures us—In sight of him it can do nothing with us. But where is the spring, when we stoop to the puddle? Are not the consolations of God small with us when we repair to worldly attractions and delights?

But the charge is too obvious to require proof—and every Christian will readily confess,

> "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
> Prone to leave the God I love."

Yet how humiliating is the fact! And how wonderful too! "Can a maid forget her ornaments? or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number," "who am their beauty, their glory; all their salvation and all their desire." How little would they themselves have supposed this possible when they first returned to him from darkness to light; from bondage to liberty; from a wilderness to the garden of the Lord! "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." And still, after renewed manifestations, and under lively impressions, they are often ready to think they can never be the same dull and ungrateful creatures they have often been—

> "When my forgetful soul renews
> The savour of thy grace,
> My heart presumes, I cannot lose
> The relish all my days.
>
> "But, ere one fleeting hour is past,
> The flattering world employs
> Some sensual bait to seize my taste,
> And to pollute my joys.
>
> "Wretch that I am, to wander thus,
> In chase of false delight!
> Let me be fasten'd to thy cross,
> Rather than lose the sight!
>
> "Make haste, my days, to reach the goal,
> And bring my soul to rest
> On the dear centre of my soul—
> My God, my Saviour's breast."

NOVEMBER 27.

"*Faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*"
1 Tim. i. 14.

These two are often spoken of in the Scriptures. And, if we observe the passages in which they occur, and especially the words of the apostle John—"This is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son—and love one another;" we shall see, that the first regards Christ, and the second, our brethren.

But let us remark their order. Faith is placed before love—and this is the case without any exception, whenever they are coupled together by the sacred writers. And there is reason for it. The order of the words is the order of the things. Faith precedes all true obedience. It necessarily goes before repentance—I cannot grieve for what I have done, unless I believe I have done amiss: and I cannot sorrow after a godly sort, unless I look on him whom I have pierced, and mourn for *him*. Faith is a radical principle. It is the root of the tree; and all the rest is branch, blossom, and fruit. It is the spring, from which every thing else in religion flows, as a stream. Love does not produce faith; but faith, love.

Yet there is a connexion between them; and their union is also as invariably expressed as their order. In truth they are inseparable. Is it conceivable, that when such a scheme as Christianity gets into the soul, it can lie there dead, or even asleep? Is it not compared to a well of water, springing up into everlasting life? to a fire, that converts every thing combustible into its own nature? to leaven hid in meal, that leavens the whole lump? Observe all the believers, who, in the Scripture, encompass us as a great cloud of witnesses. Was their faith a notion? a profession? a form of godliness without the power? Could *such* faith have saved them? True faith overcomes the world. It purifies the heart. And it works by love. It does not indeed work by love exclusively. It works by hatred, when it regards sin; and by fear, when it regards danger—So Noah, by faith, being warned of God, was moved with fear. But love is the disposition the Gospel peculiarly requires. It is the end of the commandment, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. It also is pre-eminently suited to produce it. What is God? God is love. From what principle did he act in our salvation? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. What do we see in the life and death of the Saviour but divine compassion imbodied? a love that passeth knowledge? And what is the inference? "Be

ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour."

Let us not pass over this. Some people's faith seems to work by selfishness, censoriousness, wrath, malice, and all uncharitableness. But we have no reason to conclude that we have "the faith of God's elect," unless, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, we put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

It is lamentable to think, how many of our fellow-creatures are destitute of these graces. Art thou, O my soul! a stranger to the influence of this faith and love? Let me remember, that they are infinitely important and indispensable—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

But shall I be satisfied with the reality of this faith and love, regardless of the degree? How desirable—how necessary—how attainable is more of their vital prevalency! Let me resemble the Thessalonians; of whom the Apostle could say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."

NOVEMBER 28.

"*Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*"—Prov. xxiii. 17.

The mistake of many persons is, that they view religion as something separate from common life; and which can hardly be made to agree with it. But we are to render every thing, not only consistent with godliness, but even a part of it. If Gaius was to bring friends on their way, it was to be done so as to render it not only an act of civility, but of piety—It was to be done "after a godly sort." "On Thee," says David, "do I wait all the day." And Solomon enjoins us to be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long." The day, here, is to be taken, not abstractedly, as a mere period of duration; but in reference to its concerns. There are several things, into contact with which we may expect to come every day. Let us see how the fear of the Lord will influence us with regard to each of them.

First. It will influence us as to the devotions of the day. If there be an opportunity of repairing to the house of God, and hearing his word, it will dispose us to avail ourselves of it; and so to regulate our affairs as to be able to attend. It will produce morning and evening worship at the family altar. It will also lead us to enter our closets. The principle also, will not only excite us *to* the performance of devotion, but aid us *in* it. It will throw off mere formality, or cause us to mourn over our want of spirituality and life.

Secondly. It will influence us as to the business of the day. It will require us to have some profession or calling in which we are to be employed; and in this it will induce us to be diligent. An idle man cannot be under the power of religion; and he lies open to temptation. It will also make us conscientious; governing ourselves by the fair rules of trade; not having divers weights and measures; or different kinds of goods and prices, for friends and strangers, the knowing or the ignorant. It will allow us to aim at lawful advantage: but it will regulate and moderate our desire of gain. It will make us content with subsistence and competency, without wealth and independence—"He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent." It will make us feel our reliance upon God for his blessing, without which we may rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows. Upon the same principle, it will make us grateful for success; and keep us from burning incense to our own net, and sacrificing to our own drag.

Thirdly. It will influence us as to the relaxations of the day. These we need. Who could bear unceasing, unbending drudgery? The machine would soon be worn out by perpetual friction. All indulgences are not innocent. We shall therefore avoid those that would stain the mind, and wound the conscience, and unfit us for prayer. We shall shun expensive entertainments. The most agreeable and useful recreations are the cheapest. And who can ever be at a loss for these, if they will follow nature, instead of fashion? And we shall indulge in none to excess; especially excess as to time. Of time we must always be frugal. Like the swallow, we must skim the water as we fly; or, like Gideon's followers, we must, in our pursuit, lap with the hand, rather than kneel down. The fear of the Lord will make us always watchful, with regard to *indulgence* —and *especially* in things lawful; for here we are most liable to be ensnared. God giveth us all things to enjoy: but we are not to feast ourselves without fear.

Fourthly. It will influence us as to the company of the day. Are we called to intermix with the wicked? We shall walk in wisdom towards them that are without. We shall endeavour to render our religion, not only impressive, but attractive. We shall keep our mouth as with a bridle; or, if we

speak, it will be a word in season. Do we meet with pious connexions? We shall feel towards them as brethren. We shall speak of the things touching the King. We shall not offend against the generation of the upright. Among our immediate relations, and in our family circle, we shall let the Christian appear, and maintain our consistency. If we rebuke, it will be in the spirit of love. We shall not threaten, but rather entreat. Our religion will be seen much oftener than it is heard: and we shall expect to succeed, not so much by direct effort, as by keeping our charge constantly under the exhibition of whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.

Finally. It will influence us as to the trials of the day. It will not fill us with forebodings, and prevent our enjoying the present comforts of Providence; but it will keep us from forgetting that this is a vale of tears, or thinking it strange if we are called to endure. It will teach us to look beyond instruments—to see and own the hand of God in our afflictions—to inquire wherefore he contendeth with us—to implore grace, not only to support, but to sanctify; and to enable us to honour God, and edify others, by our sufferings—and, avoiding all improper means to escape from trouble, not only hope, but quietly wait, for the salvation of God.

A concern to exemplify all this, is the best evidence of our religion. It is the way of safety, and honour, and advantage. The eye of God is upon us all the day long. He is doing us good all the day long. We may die all the day long—Let us therefore be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

NOVEMBER 29.

"*This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*"—1 John iii. 23.

The *injunction* of the latter of these, has given rise to no difficulty. But much dispute has been occasioned by the *commanding* of the former. It is undeniable, however, that the one is enjoined as well as the other—in the same passage, and—by the very same authority. He that commands us to love one another, commands us equally to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

And if so, then faith is a duty. Indeed, if it be not a duty, we are not bound to obey God. If it be not a duty, unbelief is not a sin. Yet the Holy Ghost convinces us of sin—and of sin, because we believe not on Christ. Accordingly, in conviction, with the discovery of *this* guilt, we are principally affected; and look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him. Hence, unbelief is punishable, and destroys the soul. Indeed, nothing else destroys the soul, under the Gospel. For provision is there made for our fallen condition, and pressed upon our acceptance: but we neglect so great salvation; and turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.—It is true, Divine influence is necessary. But why is it not possessed! If there be any truth in the Bible—*it is sinful to be without it.* But why should we seek after, or be thankful for, assistance to enable us to do what *we were under no obligation to do?*

This justifies ministers, in calling upon sinners to believe. There are some who condemn and ridicule them for this. But Ezekiel, in the name of God, prophesied to the dry bones, and said unto *them*—"Live." Paul made no scruple to admonish Simon Magus, though in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, to repent and pray. And to the Jailer he said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou *shalt* be saved—for he *then* was not.

As the love of God renders our duty our privilege; so the authority of God renders our privilege our duty. And is not this an advantage? For thus we are not left to the calls of self-love, and our own interest; but are bound to pursue our welfare by the command of God, and the peril arising from a neglect of it.

This also meets the state of the conscience, and affords encouragement to awakened sinners. These under a sense of their unworthiness and guilt, will be sure to ask—"But *may* I go to him, and trust in him? What *warrant* have I?" Now here is the warrant—the command of God. I may doubt my title to a promise; but I cannot question my obligation to obey a Divine command. This fully authorizes me—Yea, it not only secures me from presumption if I comply, but renders me chargeable with disobedience if I refuse. I am not afraid to love another. I never inquire, *may* I do it. I know that I ought to do it; because he has commanded it. Why then should I fear to apply to the Saviour?—And why ask, *May* I believe on him to life everlasting?—since this also is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ?

Lord, I believe—help thou mine unbelief.

NOVEMBER 30.

"*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*"
John ix. 35.

Whoever thou art that readest this page, allow the writer to address this question to THEE.

Art thou *young*—Dost *thou* believe on the son of God? O that you did! How the Scripture extols and recommends early godliness! They that seek me early, says the Saviour, shall find me—find me—for there is an emphasis in the promise; find me, as others

never will, never can, find me—find me, in a thousand peculiar preservations, honours, advantages, and delights. And what a favourable season do you now enjoy !—the body in health and strength—the mind in vigour—the memory retentive—the affections warm—the heart tender—the cares and troubles of life scarcely begun—the days distant in which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them!" Oh ! redeem the time. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Enter immediately a course that is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Art thou *old*—Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? Thy age requires respect; and I readily pay it—But thy state demands all my fidelity. And art thou, at the end of sixty, seventy, eighty years, ignorant of the Redeemer, whom to know is life eternal? Have all these departed seasons been passed only in vanity and vice ! Is thy day rapidly closing; and thy work, thy journey, not even begun ? Does thine eye, in looking back, meet with nothing but guilt; and, in looking forward, nothing but gloom ? How I pity thy condition! It is time—it is high time to awake out of sleep. And, blessed be God, it is not too late. I announce a Saviour who is able to save unto the uttermost; and who converted and pardoned the thief at the eleventh hour—Oh! seek him while he may be found; and call upon him while he is near. But if thou art old in grace, as well as in age, thy hoary head, being found in the way of righteousness, is a crown of glory. And thy salvation is nearer than when thou believedst. The night, with thee, is far spent, and the day is at hand. Yet a little while, and what a blessed deliverance ! What a glorious elevation ! Till then, let faith and patience have their perfect work. Recommend his service to others, from your own knowledge of its excellency. Take a fresh and firmer hold of him, from the proofs you have had of his faithfulness and care : and leaning upon his arm, as you descend, say—

> "By long experience, I have known
> Thy sovereign power to save;
> At thy command I venture down
> Securely to the grave."

Art thou *indulged* by Providence ? Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? Perhaps sickness led you down to the very gates of death; and you looked into eternity; and, without hope in that world, you trembled, and cried, Take me not off in the midst of my days; spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more. And he heard your cry; and said, Return again, ye children of men. And have you returned again to folly ? And have you forgotten that the vows of God are upon you ? And what is a recovered body while the soul is full of moral disease ? A reprieve, too, is not a pardon. Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Is the sentence still suspended; and the delayed execution will be attended with added terror and remorse. Perhaps thy business flourishes; thy grounds bring forth plentifully; thy cup runneth over. We do not wish you to despise the bounties of Nature and Providence; yea, you ought to be thankful for them. As to their use, they are valuable; but what are they as a *portion?* How melancholy is the thought that you must leave them ! And you know not how soon you may be torn from all your treasure. And, even in the midst of your fulness, are you not in straits ? Do you not sigh over your very enjoyments ? Does not success, as well as disappointment, tell you that this is not your rest ! Ah ! these failures of hope, these inward uneasinesses, are the inspirations of the Almighty, to give you understanding. They are designed to turn you from creatures, which are all vanity and vexation of spirit, to a Saviour, who is full of grace and truth. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.

Art thou the subject of *affliction ?* Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God ? To be poor in the world, and be destitute of the true riches; to have no friend below, and no God above; to pass from the sorrows of time into a more miserable eternity—is a state so dreadful, that every feeling of benevolence must be concerned to find a resource for its victims. And such we are happy enough to be able to open. There is the hope of Israel; the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble. His Gospel is sent to bind up the broken-hearted. Perhaps you are at your wits' end—Perhaps you are ready to curse the day of your birth —Perhaps you are tempted to destroy yourself. Beware of Satan's relief. Beware of a cure that will be far worse than the disease. And you need it not. There is One near you whom you know not. He is now stretching forth his soft hand; he is now saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land.

Art thou a *professor of religion ?* Dost thou believe on the Son of God ! "Why should you address the inquiry to me ? Had not the Church been satisfied with my character, and deemed me a believer, they would not have admitted me to their communion." But they might have been mistaken. They could only judge from outward appearance: and it became them to be candid. There is no certainty from this quarter.—"But if I had not hoped that I was a real believer in Jesus, I should not have proposed myself as a member of a Christian Church, and have come to the Lord's Table, where I should have eaten and drunken unworthily. Why, then, do you suspect me ?" My friend—I do not suspec

you; but I love you: and love, though not suspicious, is cautious. As mistakes are possible, and common, it cannot be improper for you to examine yourself, and prove whether you are in the faith. If the house be upon the sand, it is well to know it before the storm comes. But if it be built on the rock, the discovery will yield fresh satisfaction; and you will be encouraged to say—"I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

Or art thou a *real Christian?* Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God? "I know that thou believest." Yet, as pride blends with the humility of the most humble; and impatience, with the resignation of the most patient: even so, as an old writer says, how unbelieving are the best believers! When our Saviour had expressed himself more fully and clearly, his disciples exclaimed, "Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee; by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?" You think so: but imagination is not reality. I know you better than you know yourselves. And you yourselves, in a little time, will see that you have much less faith than you now profess—"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." All—all may cry out, with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

DECEMBER 1.

"*Doth Job fear God for nought?*"—Job i. 9.

THESE are the words of Satan. Some deny the agency, and even the existence of such a being. But the denial renders the language of the Scripture inexplicable and absurd; and furnishes a proof of the fact itself: for the god of this world blindeth the minds of them that believe not.

These are the words of Satan—And let us not refuse to consider them, because *he* is the speaker. Truth is the same, whoever utters it.

> "Seize upon truth, where'er 'tis found;
> Among your friends, among your foes:
> On Christian or on Heathen ground—
> The flower 's divine, where'er it grows.
> Refuse the prickles, and assume the rose."

Alluding to the Scribes, our Saviour said to his hearers, "Whatsoever they command you to observe, that observe ye: but do not after their works; for they say, and do not."

These are the words of Satan—But though we should not refuse the truth, because it comes from *him;* yet it surely becomes us to examine whether what he says *is* truth; and also for what *purpose* he says it. For even truth may be misapplied and abused. It is thus Antinomians are so injurious: by the most precious doctrines of the Gospel, they turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and make Christ the minister of sin. In our Lord's temptation, Satan had a Bible with him, and turned to the passages; or he showed a good memory for the Scripture; for he quoted it very readily. But it was for the vilest design.

Now it is easy to learn his meaning here. God had been extolling his servant Job—"The Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth: a perfect and an upright man; one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said—"He is, I acknowledge, a worshipper of thee! And no wonder. He has found it the way to grandeur and wealth. It has procured for him seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that he is the greatest man in the East. He has found godliness gain; and now makes gain godliness—Doth Job serve God for nought?"

Here we see how well Satan is called, the accuser of the brethren. He accuses them to God; and, as many of the articles are true, they would have reason to fear: but they have One in court, to nonsuit him: they have an Advocate with the Father. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." He accuses them before men. We see, from the early defences of Christianity, how much they were defamed. At their private suppers, they devoured their own infants. At their nocturnal meetings, they committed every crime that could disgrace human nature. If there was a fire or a famine, they caused the one and occasioned the other. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read, that Christians were a sect every where spoken against. It is so still: and some of the brightest characters that have adorned the Church and served their generation, in modern times, have been blacked by every vileness of imputation.

See the malignant cunning of this adversary, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour or distress. He can bring nothing against Job's conduct—this was undeniably fair and righteous: he therefore insinuates a charge against his motive. Are there none that follow his example? "He is so and so. He does so and so—and this would be very well—but it is to please his connexions—to aid his business—to gain a name. Ah! were it real—but it is all outside, all show, all pretence." Now nothing can be more *devilish* than this. There is a great difference between judging ourselves, and judging others. In the one case we cannot be too severe; in the other, we cannot be too candid—Yet the

verse of this practice commonly prevails. We should not judge ourselves only, or principally, by our actions; but by our motives, which enter so essentially into their morality. But we should judge others wholly by their conduct, and not by their motives—for these are cognizable only to God. It is his prerogative to search the heart. He will not condemn us for our ignorance of it. Charity thinketh no evil. It will always be far more honourable to be mistaken in any of our fellow-creatures, than to be suspicious of them.

Satan was right in the principle of his insinuation—That there was little to admire in Job's excellency, had he been a mere mercenary wretch, who, in all he did, had no regard for God, but to his own advantage only. Such actors there have always been. Thus Laban pressed Jacob to continue with him, not from affection or respect; but because, says he, I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. In the same way the Shechemites reasoned: "Shall not their cattle, and their substance, and every beast of theirs, be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us." Jehu said, "See my zeal for the Lord:" but it was to aggrandize himself and his family; and he was even punished for actions which fulfilled the will of God. Our Saviour did not commend those who followed him because they did eat of the loaves and fishes. He early applied a test which would evince a regard for *himself* in those that adhered to him, saying, He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple. And we always, in the conduct of our fellow-creatures, value a trifle that is done from pure regard, while we despise the splendid service that aims at the performer's own advantage.

But, though there was force in Satan's reasoning—yet, First, nothing could be more vile and false than his application of it to Job. And therefore God permitted him to be tried, that his rectitude might be found unto praise, and glory, and honour. Satan said, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Then says God, Behold, all he *hath* is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. But he bears well the destruction of the whole.—Then said Satan, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." And he is now covered with sore boils, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. But in all this he sinneth not, nor charges God foolishly; and instead of cursing him to his face, he exclaims—"Blessed be the Name of the Lord!"

And, Secondly, we must distinguish between unprincipled selfishness, and excitements to gratitude and encouragement. The supreme reason, as well as the grand rule of obedience, is the will of God. And the language of the Christian is, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do! And the providence of God will often afford him opportunities to evince that the Divine glory is dearer to him than his secular advantage. But it cannot be wrong to think of the promises; and be animated in our difficulties by the view of what the Scripture has proposed to our hope. Thus Moses is not censured for having respect unto the recompense of the reward. And Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame.

And, Thirdly, though we ought not to serve God for gain as the motive, we cannot serve God for nought as to the result. He is a good master: and while his work is honourable and glorious, he deals well with his servants. In keeping his commandments there is great reward. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

DECEMBER 2.

"*And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*"—Matt. xv. 27.

To Him, said the dying Jacob, shall the gathering of the people be. To him, said the evangelical Isaiah, shall men come. He is the centre of all attraction, because he is the only source of relief. To whom, in all our ignorance, should we go, but to him who has the words of eternal life? To whom, in all our guilt and weakness, but to him in whom we have righteousness and strength? To whom, in all our dangers and misery, but to him who is the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble? And, blessed be his name, he is not only mighty to save, but has been pleased to assure us—"him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

But he may try the confidence; he has bound himself not to disappoint. We have here an application made to him by a woman of Canaan, who cried to him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Observe the discouragements she meets with. First, his silence—"He answered her not a word." Secondly, the address of his disciples. It is not certain that they pleaded for her relief at all: but if they did, it was in a spirit that we cannot admire. They betrayed impatience, and a wish to get rid of her importunity—"His disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." Then here is, thirdly, a kind

of exclusion, which seems to place her beyond the reach of his commission, if not of his pity—"He said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." All this not driving her away; he, fourthly, speaks as if he would add insult to rejection—"Is a dog to be treated like one of the family? It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs"—"And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Let us consider this, as the language of a sinner, applying for mercy, in the prayer of faith.

First. He allows the truth of God's word, however it may reflect upon him—"Truth, Lord." He had, in effect, called the woman a dog; and nothing could have been more reproachful. We see this in the question of Hazael; and the offer of Abishai, with regard to Shimei—Among the Jews, too, a dog was an animal unclean, and forbidden in sacrifice: and God's utmost abhorrence of a victim was expressed by cutting off a dog's neck —Yet he says, "Truth, Lord"—I acquiesce in the censure.—A sinner is called every thing that is vile in the Scripture—a fool; a madman; a rebel; a traitor—unworthy of the least of all God's mercies—and deserving that his wrath should come upon him—And, Lord, says he, it is all true. And thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest. Here, others stand out; but the convinced sinner is brought to add his amen, not only to the truth of God's word in general, but the truth of it with regard to his own personal guilt, depravity, and condemnation. And till we are brought to this, the Gospel can have nothing to do with us. It is a remedy: but a remedy is for the sick, and not for the healthful. The way to attain relief and comfort, is not to deny, conceal, or extenuate our sins; but to confess them in all their heinousness; and, in dealing with God, to stand where his word places us.

Secondly. He draws encouragement from seeming repulse—"Yet, Lord." This is an exercise of spiritual understanding: but the absolute importance of the case makes the man alive to every opening of hope; and he is now under the influence of the Spirit, that is teaching him to be wise unto salvation.—Thus, darkness is made light, and crooked things straight. Thus he rises above difficulties, which would otherwise be insuperable. He distinguishes between appearances and reality. "I know that, behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face." Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. If he wounds, it is to heal. I hope I am his, *because* I am thus. As long as he tries me, he is not saying, Let him alone. He would not thus prune the tree, if he had sentenced it to be cut down. I see what once I did not; and the discovery is painful; but if he was minded to kill me, he would not have showed me such things as these. That be far from him, to trifle with my misery. In vain the enemy says, "But thy sins are so numerous and aggravated." They are: but this is the very reason why I should apply for mercy —Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great—

Thirdly. He prizes the least communication from the Saviour—"Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"—and this is all I crave. The very same sentiment is put into the mouth of the Prodigal—There is bread enough in my father's house, and I perish with hunger—he never thought of the fatted calf; or the best robe, or of the ring on his hand, or the shoes on his feet—Oh! let me return to thy dear abode, and I shall not covet the chief room, or the highest seat—Make me as one of thine hired servants. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ. David wished to be a door-keeper in the house of God. The least grace is infinitely precious. It is connected with salvation; and makes us the heirs of promise. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fourthly. He perceives the affluence and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. Though what I implore is much for me to receive, it is nothing for thee to give. It is no more than a crumb from a king's table, and what is this to the viands on his board, and the resources of his wealth!—What I implore, thou wilt not miss; and I shall not rob thy children of their portion and plenty.

—Come, therefore, to him, remembering that he is Lord of all; that he is not only rich, but that his riches are unsearchable; that he has not only fulfilled the law, but magnified it, and made it honourable; that his righteousness is the righteousness of God, by faith; that his blood cleanseth from all sin; that in him all fulness dwells.

—And he will give you not a dog's place, and a dog's portion; but he will put you among the children. He will seat you at his own table. He will say, Eat, O friends, and drink; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. Was it not so here? Was he not charmed, instead of being displeased, with her earnest and continued application? Does he not commend her for not taking a denial; and for urging him, apparently, against his will?—"O woman! great is thy faith"—not, great is thy humility, thy importunity, thy perseverance; these *were* great; but *faith* was the root of them all. This, therefore, was what he admired in her. And this is the one thing needful for us. This alone will keep us steady to our purpose; this alone will carry us through all our difficulties. This insures our final success; this crowns us with praise, and glory, and honour, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. And he said unto her, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." So will he say to you. And you will be inexcusable indeed,

if you do not avail yourselves of the largeness of the offer; and ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.

DECEMBER 3.

"Behold, I am vile."—Job xl. 4.

Vile, says Johnson's Dictionary, signifies mean, worthless, base, despicable, impure. There is nothing in the world to which this applies so well as to sin. And it is to sin the exclaimer here refers. He does not call himself vile, because he was reduced, and poor. By this no man of reflection would ever feel himself degraded. A horse is not valued for his trappings, but for his strength, or his speed. Character is a personal thing, and independent of outward circumstances. If poverty, as some fools seem to judge, made a man vile, how vile were the apostles, who could say, "We hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place!" And how vile was he who had not where to lay his head!—Nor does he call himself vile because he was diseased, and full of sore boils from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. The Scripture, indeed, calls the body "this vile body;" and it *is* truly humbling, not only in the putrefaction of the grave, but frequently also even in life. How low are some of its appetites! how mortifying some of its infirmities! while some of its diseases are so trying as to require all the force of friendship to discharge the common duties of humanity. But there are no "wounds, bruises, putrefying sores," to be compared with the effects of sin—nothing is so vile as this—This makes us abominable to God himself; and is the only thing that does render us offensive. And how loathsome must that be, that causes the Creator to abhor the work of his own hands; and the Father of mercies to punish it with everlasting destruction from his presence; and to refuse to pardon it without the sacrifice of his own Son!

But who makes this confession? Is it a profligate wretch, whose iniquity in its effects has been found to be hateful, even to himself! Is it a penitent newly awakened, and looking into his own heart that had been concealed from him before? No: but Job, a saint, and a saint of no ordinary magnitude. You have heard of the patience of Job; and know how he is mentioned by Ezekiel, along with Noah and Daniel, as one of three who were pre-eminently righteous; and how God, the Judge of all, calls him "a perfect and an upright man." Yet this is he who cries, "Behold, I am vile!" And what do we learn from hence, but this—That the most gracious characters are the most remote from vain-glory; and that they are always more affected with their imperfections than with their excellences? The nearer we approach completeness in any thing, the more easily we shall discern, and the more sensibly we shall feel, our remaining deficiencies. A little learning puffeth up; but modesty and diffidence attend profound science. The advancing in knowledge is like sailing down a river, which widens as we proceed, til. we find ourselves launched on the sea, and lose sight of the shore. Whoever vaunts himself as sinless, Paul did not. "I have not attained," says he, "I am not already perfect:" "I am less than the least of all saints:" "I am the chief of sinners." Not that there is no difference between a saint and a sinner. Job does not mean that he loved sin, or lived in sin. His friends accused him of this; but he denied it; and, turning to God, could say, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." But he knew that in many things he offended, and in every thing came short of the glory of God. He was aware of the remains of sin opposing, hindering, vexing, polluting his renewed mind; and though they appeared not to the view of others gross transgressions, they were constantly felt by himself in an evil heart of unbelief, prone to depart from the living God; and constraining him to sigh, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of his death!"

And let us observe also when this acknowledgment was made. It was immediately after God's interposition, and appearance, and address: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me." Then he displayed before him some of his works and perfections. "Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it. *Then* Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile"—Teaching us, that the more we have to do with God, the more we shall see and feel our nothingness and unworthiness. What can make us so sensible of our ignorance as *his* wisdom; of our weakness as *his* power; of our pollution as *his* purity—the purity of him in whose sight the very heavens are not clean! Those are struck with little things who have never been abroad to see greater ones. But travelling enlarges the mind, and fills it with new and superior images; so that, on our return, we think nothing of the river, and the hill, and the plain of our native village. The Queen of Sheba prided herself upon her magnificence, till she came to Jerusalem, and had seen Solomon in all *his* glory. He that has been introduced to the Lord of all, and has had communion with him, will never think highly of himself again. "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of

men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Ah! said Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

> "The more thy glories strike mine eye,
> The humbler I shall lie."

—And I need not be afraid of the effect—my pride is the only prevention of my happiness—

> "Thus while *I* sink, my *joys* shall rise
> Unmeasurably high."

DECEMBER 4.

"*Make me to know my transgression and my sin.*"—Job xiii. 23.

The desire of knowledge seems natural to every man. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. But who wishes to know *himself?* Yet this is the knowledge we want. And there are two things concerning ourselves, which it argues a gracious state of mind to be willing to know—Our mortality, and our depravity. A natural man turns away from both these. But, says David, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." And, says Job, "Make me to know my transgression and my sin."

To explore the offences of others is a common wish. The information not only gratifies curiosity, but feeds malevolence; and furnishes the salt which seasons the conversation of the multitude. But, says Job, "Make me to know *my* transgression and *my* sin."

And what does he wish to know concerning them? Their number. Their guilt. Their pollution. Their aggravation.

And this knowledge he seeks from God. He alone can teach us to profit. Conviction is the work of his own Spirit. But he uses means; and shows us our transgression and our sin—by the Law—and by the Gospel—and by friends and enemies—and by the dispensations of his providence. But he does it gradually. We could not bear all the disclosure at once—It would drive us into distraction or despair. He therefore tells us to turn again into the chamber of imagery, and we shall see greater abominations. And this will serve to explain a case in the Christian's experience. He sometimes supposes himself to grow worse, because he grows wiser. He seems more sinful, because he is more enlightened: there is not more evil in him; but he sees more.

The effect of this knowledge, in the first instance, will be wonder. It calls us out of darkness into God's marvellous light. We are astonished that he has borne with us so long: we are astonished that we have acted such a foolish, such an ungrateful part; we are astonished that we did not see these things before, for they now strike us with all the force of evidence; and we are astonished that we see them now; since the thousands around us are blind still; and we were once blind also. But the result of the discovery will be as important and useful as it is surprising.

Self-knowledge will produce self-annihilation. Self-vindication will be at an end; and we shall condemn ourselves. Self-complacency will be at an end; and we shall loathe ourselves. Self-dependence will be at an end; and we shall have no confidence in the flesh. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

Hence will arise the endearment of the Saviour. How precious is the refuge now the danger is seen! How inviting the healing fountain appears now we feel our disease! For want of this sensibility many read and hear of the Lord Jesus with indifference. How can it be otherwise? They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick. The full soul loathes the honeycomb; but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet.

Hence also submission under afflictive dispensations. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, said the Church, because I have sinned against him. Why, says Jeremiah, should a living man complain? Aaron's recollection of his making a calf just before, kept him dumb in the loss of his sons. And David felt, from his adultery and murder, how well it became him to say, in Absalom's rebellion, Here I am; let the Lord do what seemeth him good. If a Christian has nothing criminal in particular to fix upon, he will see enough in his general temper and walk to keep him from thinking that God deals hardly with him. The wonder with him will be—not that his trials are so many, but so few; not that so many of his comforts are taken, but that any are left.

Another advantage will be habitual gratitude. The proud are never thankful. Heap whatever favours upon them, and what reward have ye? They think they deserve it. You are only doing your duty—You are doing justly, rather than loving mercy. But when we are humble, in the same proportion we shall be grateful. When we feel that we are not worthy of the least of all God's mercies, how thankful shall we be for the bread we eat, and the water we drink!—What, then, shall we feel for the Word of his truth! and the Son of his love!

Finally. As we are sensible of our depravity we shall be tender towards others. Faithful dealing with ourselves will always be accompanied with candid dealing with our fellow-creatures. When we are much a-

home we cannot live much abroad. When we are employed in pulling the beams out of our own eyes we shall not have much time for finding motes in those of others. If there be a difference between us and them, we shall ascribe it, when we know ourselves, to the mercy and grace of God—He has made us to differ—and we have nothing but what we have received. If we meet with things which are really wrong, and which we cannot deny, we shall not rejoice, but weep. And if a brother be overtaken in a fault, we shall restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

Maundrell, in his fable of the bees; and Rochefoucault, in his maxims; and many infidel writers; have shown great acquaintance with the depravity of human nature. But they learned it from the devil—and the scholars felt like the teacher. They delighted in the subject. They loved to expose it. It was their interest to degrade and vilify human nature, to draw from it arguments for hatred, injury, selfishness, and distrust. But God teaches us the depravity of human nature principally through our own depravity. And, with his teaching, he communicates his own Spirit. We therefore pity our common nature. We mourn over its dishonour. We pray for our fellow-sinners. We long to save them.

DECEMBER 5.

"*This* man *shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.*"—Micah v. 5.

That the Messiah is the person here intended will not be denied by those who read the verses immediately preceding; and which speak so expressly of his incarnation and glory. The word *man*, indeed as the italics apprize us, is not in the original. The sentence therefore reads, "And this shall be the peace—This person, of whom the prophet had been just speaking; he who was born as the ruler in Bethlehem, and whose goings forth were from everlasting—"He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." The translators, therefore, should rather have put in the word Ruler or Shepherd. But, whatever be the supplement, it all comes to the same, provided *he himself* be understood; who is all our salvation, and all our desire—For "this shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land."

But who is this Assyrian? The word cannot be taken literally. The Assyrians never entered Judea after the birth of Christ. It is therefore used, metaphorically, for some enemy; nothing being more common than for the sacred writers to express, by the name of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon, any significant adversary; as those powers had distinguished themselves by their hatred, oppression, and enslaving of the Jews. The intimation, therefore, is better than if it had been more definite; as we may now include every thing that annoys and alarms; every thing that would injure or destroy. Be the case what it may, he is our principal, our only relief. He does not exempt us from trouble and conflict; but he affords us assistance, comfort, and deliverance. Storms may arise; but he is our stronghold. Enemies may assail us; but he will give us victory at last, and even now keep our minds in perfect peace, being stayed on him.

Let us think of several of these Assyrians; and see how, when they invade us, and would swallow us up, he is our peace. Does the broken law of God threaten us? I say, the broken law of God—A man has nothing to fear from it when it is perfectly kept; for the man that doeth these things shall live in them. But the soul that sinneth it shall die. The curse enters through every breach of transgression. And who is not, therefore, exposed? Who can be so ignorant as to imagine that he has continued in all things written in the book of the law to do them? Now here is a condition to be in! The commandment coming—sin reviving—hope dying—and nothing expected but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment! But he is our peace, who died for our offences, and rose again for our justification—

> "Go, ye that rest upon the Law,
> And toil, and seek salvation there:
> Look to the flames that Moses saw
> And fear, and tremble, and despair.
>
> "But I'll retire beneath the Cross—
> Saviour, at thy dear feet I lie;
> And the keen sword that justice draws,
> Flaming and red, shall pass me by."

Or does our adversary the devil terrify? Oh! you say, when I think of his wiles, and strength, and his successes for near six thousand years; and when I consider myself—here is enough to fill me, not only with dread, but despair. What am I to the powers of darkness? No more than a "worm to a mountain!" Well, be it so: the promise is, "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob; for thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small as the dust." In the Lord you have not only righteousness, but strength. Think of him, and take courage. In all these things you are more than conquerors, through him that loved you.

Or do we complain of the sin that dwelleth in us? A Christian must feel this, and ought to feel it, and be deeply humbled before God on the account of it. Paul felt it; and felt it more than he felt all his sufferings—"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" But where does he find relief? "I thank God, through

Jesus Christ our Lord"—"He will save me from my sins; and not only from their dominion—but their very being. He has begun a good work in me, and he will finish it. My sanctification *will* be as complete as my justification now is. He is not only able to keep me from falling, but to present me faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Or do we consider the troubles of life? In accordance with this very case, he said to his disciples, In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye shall have peace. And they found it so, and could acknowledge, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Modern Christians may not be called to suffer persecutions as they did; but they may be the subjects of personal and relative trials, which require the same support and solace; and they equally belong to him; and are never dearer to his heart than in the hour of affliction: and he will not leave them comfortless. Is it nothing to know that he has removed every thing penal from thy sufferings?—that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee?—that his grace shall be sufficient for thee?—and that all thy sorrows shall yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness?

—But death! Death is called the king of terrors. Who can wonder that we should feel at the approach of it? And where would be the triumph of faith if we did not? But it is possible to rise above this enemy. We know it from Scripture. We know it from observation. And whence comes the victory? Persons may die insensibly; or they may banish the subject from their minds: but, if a man thinks of it, and thinks of it properly, there is only one relief when this Assyrian approaches us. It is to see him that has "abolished death." It is to hear him saying, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And this is not all. The enemy is not only disarmed by him, but turned into a friend. The curse is converted into a blessing. To die is gain; and gain too generally in the experience, as well as always in the result. Well, therefore, could David say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Behold the Consolation of Israel. Whatever would dismay us, let us look towards him, and say—"This same shall comfort us." Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

DECEMBER 6.

"Hast not thou made an hedge about him."
Job i. 10.

This was the question of Satan. The design of it was crafty and cruel: it was to insinuate, that Job's religion was all mercenary. Therefore, no sooner had God extolled him (who can stand before envy?) than "Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him?" But though the motive he ascribes to Job is false, it is otherwise with the condition he represents him to be in. It was true that God had made a hedge about him: and he does the same for all believers. Three things may be inferred from it.

First. God's people must be dear and valuable, otherwise he would not make a hedge about them. Men do not incur expense, and take pains to fence in a wilderness, a common, or a dunghill; but only what they set a price upon. "Since," says God, "thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." This love "passeth knowledge." His vineyard, his garden, his jewels, his children, his bride, are not so dear and precious to their owner as all the subjects of divine grace are to God—"The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in them that hope in his mercy."

Secondly. They must be liable to danger and injury—Why else should he make a hedge about them? They are exposed to the same perils with others. But they have many which are peculiar to themselves, because of their new state, and character, and privileges. David admits this; "Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of my enemies." They were all around him, looking on, ready to seize his comfort, and destroy his person. What is the language of every awakened soul? "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many there be that rise up against me." And as they are numerous, so they are malicious, wise, and powerful; and would soon overcome him; but his help cometh from the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Thirdly. They must be safe whatever evils encompass them. For they do not lie opened and unguarded—God has made an hedge about them. We have often heard the remark—and it is as true as it is common, "They are well kept whom God keeps." What he does for the safety of his people must be effectual. Therefore the Church says, "Save me, and I *shall be* saved; for thou art my praise." His power is almighty; and he saveth by his right hand them that put their trust in him from them that rise up against them. He keeps them as the apple of the eye. He that keepeth Israel never slumbers nor sleeps. Lest any hurt them, says he, I will keep them night and day. But how far does this hedge extend? It reaches to his estate—his business—his dwelling-place—his family—his reputation—his body—his soul—"Hast not thou made an hedge about *him?* and about his *house?* and about *all* that he hath on *every* side?"

But here it may be asked, How does this subject harmonize with observation and experience? Do not his people sometimes suffer losses and injuries as well as others? We must distinguish between their spiritual and their temporal condition. With regard to the former their security is absolute: they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. But as to the latter, their preservation is conditional. It is never absolutely promised: and the reason is, because it is not essential to their welfare. Yea, sometimes the removal of a temporal good is a greater blessing than the continuance of it; and is even indispensable to some higher advantage. But, with regard to every injury or loss in their temporal interests, there are two things which should always be remembered; and they ought to be sufficient to set their hearts at rest. The one is, that the loss or injury is entirely under the Divine permission. Nothing can touch a hair of their head without leave from their heavenly Father. Satan could do nothing against Peter till he had "desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat." And so here. Satan walked around this hedge; and peeped through; and stood tip-toe to look over with envy and malice—but could not reach to touch his body, no, nor even one of his servants or sheep, till God, for the trial of Job, allowed him. The other is—that the permission is always and invariably regulated by the wisdom and goodness of his God, who loves them infinitely better than they love themselves. He that spared not his own Son, will withhold no good thing from them. He does not afflict willingly: but every trial he employs has a purpose to serve that will evince, in due time, even the kindness of the dispensation, and enable the sufferers to acknowledge with praise, It is good for me that I have been afflicted.

Let his people, therefore, hearken unto him, and dwell safely; and be in quiet from the fear of evil.

DECEMBER 7.

"And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him."—Luke ix. 42.

—Fearful of losing his prey—hating to have him cured—and wishing to prevent the display of the Saviour's goodness and power, he could not, indeed, hinder the deliverance; but he did what he could.

There is no coming to our Saviour now, as persons came in the days of his flesh. He is no more in the world, as to his bodily presence. Yet we may come to him spiritually, by faith and prayer. And, in the suffering of this patient, we have an emblem of what we may meet with, as we are approaching. We can never seek him in vain: but our case may seem worse before relief arrives. We may be thrown down, and torn in the way. God saw the affliction of Israel, and resolved to save them: but before they left Egypt, their bondage was more sorely felt; and as soon as they had escaped, Pharaoh pursued them, and hemmed them in. As long as people remain regardless of Christ, the enemy keeps them in peace; but when they begin to inquire in earnest after him, then commences the conflict: and this is the language of many an applicant, as "he is a coming"—"O my God! my soul is cast down within me."

Some of his difficulties and discouragements may arise from the opposition of friends and relations. Marvel not, said the Saviour, if the world hate you. We have no reason to believe our religion is the religion of the Bible, if it be palatable to the taste of carnal minds. How often, as soon as a man becomes decided, is he had in derision of all around him, and like one mocked of his neighbour! And is it not trying to proceed in a course that will break up connexions otherwise agreeable? and draw upon him their sneer or their laugh? their ridicule or their menaces?—Yet he must go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. And he ought to rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his name But every thing cannot be expected at first. The trial is greater when a man's foes are those of his own house; when the persecution comes from those he loves; and ought even to obey—only in the Lord. But the trial is greatest—at least to a grateful and ingenuous mind, when the persecution results, not from violence and threatenings; but from kindness, and entreaties, and tears. Yet through all this he must press—"He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me—and he that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple."

Sometimes the coming soul has difficulties arising from ignorance of the method of salvation. These indeed will not remain long, when the heart is brought into a proper state, and the man cries, What must I do to be saved? But some are alarmed before they are enlightened: as a person may be awakened in the dark, and not know which way to flee from the evil. Or as a patient may be sensible of the danger of his disease, before he knows the physician or the remedy. Some have not had parents who taught them the truth, as it is in Jesus: and they have no access to evangelical preaching; and they are not blessed with such Christian companions as can guide their feet into the path of peace. What wonder, therefore, if such, for awhile, should betake themselves (for something, in such cases, will be done—they cannot sit still) to improper expedients, and self-righteous means of relief! For all legalists are not of

the same kind. Some are such from disposition: and these are the bitterest adversaries of the Gospel; and the presentation of the truth to them only draws forth their enmity. But others are such from want of better information only: and when they find the light, they rejoice in it—"This is what my soul was following hard after—O that I had known it earlier; and, instead of working like a slave, had believed on him that justifieth the ungodly: and, instead of attempting to build up a wretched shelter of my own, I had only fled for refuge to the hope set before me!"

Allied to this is another discouragement the coming sinner feels, springing from doubts and fears, when he does perceive the way, and is informed that there is salvation in no other. Pressed down with such a sense of his unworthiness, and with such views of the number and heinousness of his sins, as he never had before; he is ready to conclude, that such immense blessings cannot be for *him;* and that *his* claiming them would be no better than presumption. Let not such a despondming soul refuse to be comforted. Let him ask —What recommendation had Manasseh? Where am *I* excluded from hope? Does he not say, Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth? If I have nothing with which to purchase, am I not invited to "buy without money, and without price?"

An apprehension, too, of the arduous duties of the Christian life, is frequently very dismaying. The Scripture tells him that this life is a building and a warfare; a very expensive building, and a very awful warfare: and enjoins him, before he begins, to count the cost of the one, and the resources of the other. He does this; and feels himself perfectly inadequate to both. And so he may feel, and ought to feel: for when he is poor, then is he rich; and when he is weak, then is he strong. But fear not, says the Saviour; for I am with thee. My grace is sufficient for thee. As thy days, so shall thy strength be. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Finally. There are things among the professors of religion, which often perplex and scandalize young converts. Such are the diversities of opinion among them. And their alienation from each other, because of their little distinctions. And the falls of some. And the backslidings of others. Older and wiser Christians know how to account for all this, without shaking their faith and hope—though it is always grievous even to them: but the weak find them stumbling-blocks, over which they often fall. For which reason, the Apostle says to the believing Hebrews, "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way: but let it rather be healed."

Two things must now be fixed in the mind. The one is—that whatever would impede our coming to Christ, is from Satan; and should be resisted accordingly. The other is—that whatever difficulties we may encounter, come to him we must. It is not a matter of indifference—It is the one thing needful—We perish without it. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life."

DECEMBER 8.

"*If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.*"—2 Cor. xi. 30.

We may consider these infirmities under two classes.

First; as outward and natural. Thus they include bodily weaknesses and indispositions. Some, by reason of a healthful and firm constitution, know little of these infirmities, and can scarcely sympathize with those who are the subjects of them. But Paul was no stranger to them. I was with you, says he to the Corinthians, in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. They also include all other external afflictions; whatever lowers a man's condition, and weakens him in the opinion of the world, who always judge after outward appearances. If it were necessary to prove this, we might refer to the Apostle's sufferings, as recorded in the preceding verses, and to which he obviously alludes: and also to what he immediately subjoins, as an illustration, in his escape from Damascus, by the wall in a basket; and the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him—ending with his noble avowal; "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

There is something wonderful in this. For all these things are viewed as disadvantages, and give rise to emotions of grief and shame, rather than of joy and glory. People glory in their beauty—not in their deformity: in their strength—not in their weakness: in their dignity—not in their meanness: in their praise—not in their disgrace: in their successes—not in their disappointments. But Paul says, "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." Let us make a distinction here. Absolutely considered, these things are evils in themselves: and it does not become a Christian to pray for them, or go out of his way to meet with them. But when he is called to suffer them according to the will of God, he should remember that there are purposes to be answered by them, which render them

relatively valuable and excellent. If medicine be regarded only as to its taste, we say it is offensive, and we should decline it: but when the necessity and usefulness of it are perceived, and we think of the health to be restored, and the life to be prolonged by it; we not only consent to take it, but even thankfully pay for the otherwise disagreeable remedy. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." So it is here: Paul glories in things which *concern* his infirmities. What are these? We may consider them as preservatives or preventions. Thus, when Israel was going astray after her lovers, says God, "I will hedge up her way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not be able to find her paths." And as restorers—Thus David says, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." I was sick; he bled me; and I recovered. And as probations—to evince and display the reality and degree of our religion: the tenderness of God's care; the supports of his grace; and the truth of his word. Of this quality were Job's sufferings. And as preparatives—for usefulness here, and heaven hereafter. How these views of faith are sufficient to alter our estimate of the dispensation, and to change our feelings under it!

But, secondly; we may consider these infirmities as inward and spiritual. Thus they comprise all those weaknesses and deficiencies of grace under which the best now labour; and which lead them to pray, "Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us." Something is wanting in their faith, hope, courage, patience, and spiritual understanding. Even Paul could say, I have not attained; I am not already perfect. But are not these infirmities matter of humiliation, rather than of glorying? Yes; and the believer blushes and groans over them. Nor will an apprehension of his security reconcile him to his remaining imperfections. Yea, a persuasion of God's constant love towards him will induce him the more to bewail them. Yet there are things which *concern* these infirmities, for which he feels thankful, and in which he rejoices. Four of these may be mentioned.

First. The means of grace are things which concern our infirmities. They are rendered necessary by them, and are designed to relieve them. In heaven they are laid aside: there they are needless. But the Christian now cries, Send us help from the sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion. And by waiting upon the Lord, he renews his strength.

Secondly. The promises are things which concern our infirmities. "To him that hath shall be given" "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." When we read all this, let the weak say I am strong. But for these assurances we must despond: but now we read, and go on; read, and fight on; read, and suffer on. We rejoice at his word, as one that findeth great spoil.

Thirdly. The influences of the Spirit are things which concern our infirmities. How is a Christian to live, or walk? He lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit. How does he pray? In the Holy Ghost. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Observe the ground of the Apostle's hope, with regard to himself, in the issue of all his sufferings: "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." And with him there is a rich abundance: and in him all fulness dwells: and to him we have also a free and invited access.

Fourthly. The last thing that concerns our infirmities, is the removal of them by death. A certain removal. A removal nigh at hand. An entire removal—Every one of them will be done away with—and for ever!

DECEMBER 9.

"*I am a burden to myself.*"—Job vii. 20.

And perhaps this is not all—perhaps you are a burden to others also.

—But we will leave this; and inquire whether you are a burden to yourself. We may put the complaint into the mouth of four classes.

It is sometimes the language of the afflicted. Thus it was the exclamation of Job. We talk of trouble! He could say, "Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow." Read the affecting relation; dwell on all the dismal items; and wonder not that *he* should say, "I am a burden to myself." If we cannot approve of the strength of his complaint, we hardly know how to condemn it; God himself overlooks it; and only holds him forth as an example of patience. All sufferers cannot, indeed, say, truly, as he did, "My stroke is heavier than my groaning." Yet the heart's bitterness is known only to itself. We cannot determine the pressure of another's mind under suffering: for the feeling of affliction may be actually much greater, than we should have supposed from the degree of it. But afflictions may be great in themselves, from their number, and tre-

quency, and suddenness, and subject. Is this thy case? Yield not to impatience and despondency. Such afflictions have often introduced a train of mercies; and the valley of Achor has been a door of hope. How many in heaven, how many on earth, are now thanking God for their trials! He knows how to deliver. Say—"Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee."

It is sometimes the language of the disengaged and idle. None so little enjoy life, and are such burdens to themselves, as those who have nothing to do—for

> "A want of occupation is not rest—
> A mind quite vacant, is a mind distress'd."

Such a man is out of God's order; and opposing his obvious design in the faculties he has given him, and the condition in which he has placed him. Nothing, therefore, is promised in the Scripture to the indolent. Take the indolent, with regard to exertion—What indecision! What delay! What reluctance! What apprehension! "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets." "The way of a slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain." Take him, with regard to health—What sluggishness of circulation! What depression of spirits! What dulness of appetite! What enervation of frame! Take him, with regard to temper and enjoyment—Who is pettish and fretful? Who feels wanton and childish cravings? Who is too soft to bear any of the hardships of life? Who broods over every little vexation and inconvenience? Who not only increases real, but conjures up imaginary evils? and gets no sympathy from any one in either? Who feels time wearisome and irksome? Who is devoured by ennui and spleen? Who oppresses others with their company? and their questions, and censorious talk? The active only have the true relish of life. He who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy. Recreation is only valuable, as it unbends us; the idle know nothing of it. It is exertion that renders rest delightful, and sleep sweet and undisturbed. That the happiness of life depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or lawful calling, which engages, helps, and enlivens, all our powers, let those bear witness who, after spending years in active usefulness, retire, to *enjoy themselves*. Prayers should be always offered up for their servants and wives—and for themselves too. They are a burden to themselves.

It is the language of the wicked. Not always indeed: but much oftener than they are willing to own. It may not come from them in the circle of their companions; but it is sighed out in private, when the charm of amusement has ceased, and conscience tries to be heard. They may pretend (for hypocrisy is not confined to religion) to be peaceful; but they know that one thought of God is sufficient to destroy all the calm. They may profess to admire the world; but they know it affords them no satisfaction. They know they return jaded from all their excursions of avarice, ambition, and sensuality, still asking, Who will show us any good? They know that, in this uncertain state, they are always trembling for the idols of their hearts; that they look for no support in trouble; and dread the approach of death, to the fear of which they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. Sin and sorrow are inseparable. God himself has told us that the way of transgressors is hard, and that there is no peace to the wicked. Many sins bring their own punishments along with them. Envy is the rottenness of the bones. "Pride is restless as the wind." What a torment is the spirit of revenge! What must be the apprehension of the thief! and the terror of the murderer! What the remorse of a villain who has seduced a fellow-creature from the path of virtue, and made her ignominious and wretched for life! What the feelings of a drunkard, who has ruined his business, and covered his wife and children with rags! How often does the sinner become the contempt of the neighbourhood! How often does he contract infirmities and diseases, which lie down with him in the dust! Yes! *he* may well say, I am a burden to myself! and, to get rid of the intolerable load, he not rarely lays violent hands upon himself; saying, with Cain, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

It may be the language of the godly. We mean, not only or principally as they are afflicted—then they would coincide with the first class of complainants. Many, indeed, are the afflictions of the righteous, and they are not required to be insensible under them. But there are things which they feel more painfully than outward trouble. The temptations of Satan—A world lying in wickedness—The imperfections of their graces—The remains of corruption within them—Wanderings in duty—An evil heart of unbelief—Distrust of their best Friend—The grievings of his Holy Spirit. Another cannot enter into all this; it requires the feelings of a renewed mind: but this induces the believer to say, "I loathe it, I would not live always." O wretched man that I am! said Paul; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Is there any relief? The very experience is a token for good. Your case is not peculiar—All your brethren, while in this tabernacle, groan too, being burdened. You will not be a burden to yourself always. You now say, Behold, I am vile: wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes. But you will soon be reconciled to yourselves, without

pride. Your knowledge will be without obscurity. Your services without imperfection. Your pleasure without pain. And He who is now keeping you from falling, will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

DECEMBER 10.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day."
Rev. i. 10.

This proves how early, among Christians, one day in the week was distinguished from the rest. And it is obvious, that the day thus distinguished was the *first* day of the week; for no other is ever styled "the Lord's day" in the New Testament, or by any of the ancient writers. It is called "the Lord's day," not only by way of distinction, but excellency: being appropriated to his service, and consecrated to his honour, as the day of his resurrection from the dead, and of entering into his rest from the works of redemption.

To be in the Spirit often signifies to be inspired, or to receive communications immediately from God; and it is certain that John was thus honoured. But the phrase may be used in reference to a spirituality of mind: and doubtless John experienced this also; and it prepared him for the sublime discoveries he was favoured with. Though miracles have ceased, the Spirit is still given in his ordinary influences; and if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. We are required to pray in the Holy Ghost; to worship God in the Spirit; to live and walk in the Spirit. Hence the common notion of our being in the Spirit on the Lord's day is perfectly scriptural. But we must distinguish between our being in the Spirit, and the Spirit being in us. The latter denotes the reality of his influence, the former the abundance. Thus we say, a man is in love, or in liquor, or in a passion—to intimate that he is entirely seized and governed by it. We are not only to possess the Spirit, but to be possessed by it—"Be ye filled with the Spirit." It is not enough for us to be in a spiritual state; we must be also in a spiritual frame.

We must not, however, confine the import of this expression as some do. They never think of their being in the Spirit on the Lord's day but when they are relieved, comforted, delighted. We love feeling in religion; but religious feelings are many and various. It is desirable to pass the Sabbath in liveliness, liberty, and joy: and we read of the Spirit of life; and of a free Spirit; and of the comfort of the Holy Ghost. But a mournful Sabbath may be a very profitable one: and we are never more in the Spirit than when we are deeply sensible of our unworthiness; and exclaim, at the foot of the Cross, Behold, I am vile; and hunger and thirst after righteousness. For, is he not the Spirit of truth? the convincer of sin? the Spirit of grace and of supplication? And does he not lead us to look upon him whom we have pierced, and to mourn for him?

Who does not know by experience that the day and the Spirit are not always thus united! Who has not had Sabbaths devoid of all proper religious affections? This should be a matter of deep humiliation. How piercing should be the thought of a lost Sabbath! Lost, never to return! Lost, yet to be accounted for! But what is a dull and formal attendance on the services of the season without those influences which the day requires, and is in itself adapted to produce!

As the richest Sabbath, with regard to means and ordinances, may be passed without the Spirit; so we may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day when the day is attended with few, or none of these advantages. Was it not thus with the beloved disciple? Oh! there are Sabbaths when every thing is attractive: when we go to the house of God in company; when our eyes see our teachers; when our ears hear the joyful sound of salvation by grace! But John's Sabbath was a day of suffering, of privation, of exile, of solitude, in a desert isle—

> "Where the sound of the church going bell
> Those rocks and those valleys ne'er heard;
> Never sigh'd at the sound of a knell,
> Or smiled when a Sabbath appear'd."

But heaven was opened unto him; and perhaps he never had such a Sabbath on earth before. A Christian may never be less alone than when alone. His consolations may equal, yea, exceed his sufferings. While his body is fettered, his soul may range in all the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Yes; you may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, when denied the privileges of the sanctuary. If you keep away, from indifference, or indolence, or to save expense, when you have the ability to procure accommodation; or from any of those excuses which would detain you from nothing else; you have no reason to expect the Divine sanction. But sometimes traveling, even on the Lord's day, by land or by water, may be unavoidable. Or accident, or disease, or infirmity, or age, may confine you. In which case, the Lord will not despise his prisoners. And they shall know the blessedness of those whose strength is in him, and in whose hearts are the ways of them. It is better to want opportunity and power than the will, when we serve Him who looketh at the heart. Nothing can be a substitute for him. But he is a substitute for every thing. And he is always accessible. And "if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly

Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"

DECEMBER 11.

"*And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.*"—Job xlii. 10.

Job was once the greatest man in the East. But he was stripped of every thing, except life; and became, as a sufferer, proverbial for ever. How long his calamities continued we cannot determine. At length, however, the shadow of death was turned into the morning. His troubles were all removed; his losses all repaired; and his latter end blessed more than his beginning. Hence says the apostle James, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

His state of affliction is called "his captivity." Did then the Chaldeans and Sabeans, when they robbed him, make him also a prisoner? The term is metaphorical. Yet there is a striking reality, as the foundation of it. By the permission of Providence, Satan, for awhile, had him in his possession, to go as far as he pleased, in destroying his substance, and afflicting his body. In consequence of this, a troop of woes seized him; and his feet, as he says, were made fast in the stocks. David, also, expresses himself much in the same way: "Bring my soul out of prison."—He despiseth not his prisoners. A state of affliction is not only unpleasant, but confining. Losses in property abridge a man of his former excursions of pleasure, and curtail his entertainments. Sickness arrests a man, and leads him away from company and business, and confines him to a bed of languishing. It detains a good man from the sanctuary; and when he thinks of his former freedom and privileges, he pours out his soul in him: for he had gone to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day.

His deliverance was of the Lord—"The Lord turned again his captivity." "He that is our God, is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Some ascribe their deliverances to chance; some to the favour of their fellow-creatures; some to their own wisdom and care: but this is no better than idolatry. Faith will lead us to see and acknowledge the agency of God's hand, whatever means may have been employed. And till God command deliverance, vain is the help of man. "Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." But *he* knows how to deliver: and when his time is come, he not only can, but he will make a way for our escape. "Therefore," says the Church, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

But it is peculiarly worthy of our remark, that the deliverance was accomplished "when he prayed for his friends." These friends had acted a very unkind part. They had not only mistaken his case, but charged him with hypocrisy, and loaded him with reproach. This was no easy thing to bear. He labours to convince them, but in vain. Yet he felt no resentment; but even prayed for them! This is the best thing we can do in such cases. It will keep us more than any thing else from the effects of unhallowed passion; and enable us to comply with the command, "Love your enemies." We *cannot* love them *as* we love others; but if we can sincerely pray for them, it is a proof we love them in the sense of the injunction.

But we here see not only the forgiving temper of Job, but the efficacy of prayer. As it is said, The Lord turned again his captivity *when* he prayed for his friends; it would seem that the deliverance commenced while he was engaged in the exercise. This is no unusual thing: for, says God, "*While* they call I will answer." But if it did not take place *in* the exercise, it followed *immediately after*. And thus it affords a proof, that he is a God hearing prayer. Thus it encourages us to come to the throne of his grace. And not only for ourselves, but for others also. And not only for their welfare, but our own. Not only because it may avail much for them, but also because it may be beneficial to ourselves. Thus Job's praying not only obtained pardon for his friends, but deliverance for himself! And though he had often prayed under his afflictions, the prayer he noured with his deliverance was not a personal, but a relative prayer.

Let us not forget this; and let us extend it to all other cases of beneficence. If we do no good to those who are the objects, we must do good to those who are the agents. It cannot be in vain, with regard to ourselves. Our prayer, if not successful, will return into our own bosom, and leave a blessing behind it. "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again."

DECEMBER 12.

"*And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*"—Matt. xxvii. 61.

While upon the Cross He hung,
The Marys near him stay'd;
And, when from the tree releas'd,
Beheld where he was laid:
Fearless to the place they ran;
All their hope was buried there;
And, with grief, and wonder, sat
Before the sepulchre.

Love it was detain'd them here:
And sacred was the spot;
Soon the scene revived their faith,
And mem'ry ne'er forgot.
From the crowd *I* glad withdraw,
And, with them, to muse I'm come;
And prefer to Eden's bliss,
One tear at such a tomb.

Here, within this grave, now sleeps
The best, the only Friend;
Here, the lips of Truth are seal'd,
And Mercy's journeys end.
Here, the light, the life of men
Is early quench'd and dead—
How deserveless now appear
All other tears I've shed!

Ah! how low his sacred head!
Reposes here for me!
And how deep, though once so rich,
Is now his poverty!—
Nought of earth, in life or death,
His own he ever knew:
Borrow'd was his place of birth;
His grave was borrow'd too!

But what terrors seize my frame!
A trembling shakes the ground;
And the door, though thrice secur'd,
Is now wide open found—
On the stone the angel sits,
And frowns the guards to flight;—
Yet his looks and words, to me
Speak safety and delight.

'He thou seekest is not here;
Come view his lowly bed;
And, with haste, go tell his friends,
He 's risen from the dead.'
—As I go, himself I meet—
'All hail!' he greeting cries;
'I have crush'd sin, death, and hell,
And open'd Paradise!

'I'm alive for evermore:
And all that mourn with thee,
Like myself their Head, shall live,
For evermore with me.'
'Tis enough—in every state
This truth my hope revives—
And, should every comfort die,
I know my Saviour *lives*.

DECEMBER 13.

"*And this I pray, That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.*"—Phil. i. 9.

ACCORDING to this prayer, there is nothing in which we should abound more than love. It is the fulfilling of the Law. The end of the Gospel-commandment. The bond of perfectness. Without it, whatever be our attainments, professions, or sacrifices, we are NOTHING.

Yet we are to abound in it, *wisely*. This is not found in all religious characters. In one, we perceive zeal; in another, discretion. One is clear, but cold. Another is warm, but inconsiderate. If we could meet with an individual who, in his experience and practice, blended these qualities; who had the heart, as well as the head, and the head, as well as the heart, of the Christian: *he* would be the prayer of the Apostle fulfilled—"I pray, That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."

Our love does not thus abound, when we do not distinguish between what is supreme and what is subordinate. There are things in religion which are essential, and things which are only circumstantial. Am I to lay as much stress upon the latter as upon the former? Is the form of the railing of a bridge to be compared with the foundation of the buttresses, or the key-stones of the arch? Is the finger, though useful, of the same importance to the continuance of life, as the heart and the lungs? What is an article about Church government, or the mode of administering an ordinance, compared with the doctrine of justification by faith, or redemption by the blood of Christ! I venerate a man who is all diligence to convert sinners from the error of their way, and save souls from death: but I cannot feel the same towards the zealot of bigotry, whose aim is to make proselytes to his own peculiarities; and who regards his community, not as a *part*, but as a *party*.

Persons may not be judicious in their devotional exercises. By the frequency of public attendances, they may exclude or abridge the duties of the family, or the closet. They may so lengthen out the worship at the domestic altar, as to produce in children and servants weariness and aversion. Persons may hazard their health, by going forth under bodily indisposition: forgetting that God requires mercy, and not sacrifice; and that when *He* deprives us of the ability, he accepts the ready mind.

Nor does our love abound in knowledge and in all judgment, when it carries us out of our own places and stations to be useful. Grace always gives us the desire to do good, but Providence must furnish the opportunities. We are not to be unruly or break the ranks, as the word is; but to march orderly, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The Lord puts us where we ought to be; and enjoins us to abide in our calling. There are, indeed, occasional deviations from this rule; but they are exceptions; and must be justified by their own circumstances. When Saul's courtiers reflected upon the Shepherd of Bethlehem, as a restless, ambitious young man, who wished to struggle out of obscurity into public life; he was conscious that he followed only the Providence of God; and could make this appeal—"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." But there is danger, not only of impatience, but pride, in all changes attended with the hope of elevation; and surely it becomes a man to consult some one besides *himself* concerning them. A man, by acting unlawfully, may do good: but the result does no justify the means. Whatever excitements persons may have to act irregularly, they are, upon the whole, far most useful by consistency. Their example, in the latter, *must* do good: but, in the former, it *may* lead astray. I have known men who have been stunned for life by

striking their head against a pulpit. I have known preachers who have neglected their families, and left their children to rove wild in the street or the field, while they were teaching in the villages. I have known females who have disregarded their husbands and household affairs, to run unseasonably after favourite ministers. "The wisdom of the prudent," says Solomon, "is to understand *his* way"—that is, what becomes *him* to do: whether as a master, or a servant; as a father, or a child; as rich, or as poor; in every relation and condition of life. Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?

Many err much in the discharge of the duties they owe to others. Reproof may be more than thrown away, owing to the manner in which it is applied. It is done in anger; but it should flow from the spirit of meekness. It is done in public; but we should tell our neighbour his fault alone. We should distinguish, also, between one disposition and another; and become all things to all men, if by any means we may gain some. He that winneth souls is wise. We must therefore walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Wisdom must regulate our discourse. We must know when to speak. What to speak. How to speak—"A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." We shall not talk discouragingly before those that are weak in the faith; not perplex them with doubtful disputations. We may give strong meat to strong men; but babes require milk.

We may also err in cases of charity. Since we cannot relieve all the necessitous, we must endeavour to ascertain the most proper objects. Alms may become immoral by encouraging vice, or idleness. Religious societies are to be encouraged and supported; but God abhors robbery, for a burnt-offering. And many an annual *printed* subscription robs, not only the tradesman, but the poor. Nothing is to incapacitate us to succour the domestic and personal distress which *Providence itself* brings immediately before us; and by which some sublimely pass, to attend public meetings. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

These are not all the instances in which our love is to abound in knowledge and in all judgment. But these are sufficient to show us, that wisdom is profitable to direct. Wherefore let us not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Let us cultivate our minds. Let us faithfully review our own conduct; and see where we have been mistaken. Let us keep observation alive and awake. Let us walk with wise men. Let us be familiar with the Holy Scriptures, which can furnish us throughly unto all good works. Let us often read and study the Proverbs of Solomon. Let us constantly keep in view, the life of Jesus, who dealt prudently; and so was exalted, and extolled, and was very high. Above all, let us seek the Spirit of Truth—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

DECEMBER 14.

"I will say unto God, Do not condemn me."
Job x. 2.

He could have resolved on nothing better in his affliction, than betaking himself to God. It was turning to him that smote him; and resembling the child, who, when corrected by the mother, always clings to her knee. We are too fond of taking our complaints to men—but

> "Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
> To Heaven in supplication sent;
> Our cheerful cry would oftener be—
> Hear what the Lord hath done for me!"

If I weep, says Job, "mine eye poureth out tears unto God:" and if I speak, "I will say unto God"—

But what does he say? "Do not condemn me." Now there was no real ground for this fear. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Their sins, once pardoned, if sought for, shall never be found. And their afflictions, however distressing, have nothing penal in them; they are only like the fire to the gold, and pruning to the vine, and medicine to the patient, and correction to the child. We are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

But the language implies, that he knew God could charge him with guilt enough to condemn him, if he should deal with him after his desert. And every child of God feels this. In reviewing even the most innocent periods of his life, and the devoutest services in which he was ever engaged, he exclaims, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord: for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

It shows us also, that a child of God is prone to fear the displeasure of God in his afflictions. The people of the world, as we see in the case of the Barbarians, with regard to Paul's viper; and the caution of our Lord, with regard to the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell; deem their fellow-creatures sinners, because they suffer such things. And though we are much more disposed to judge others by this erroneous rule than ourselves; there is something in calamity, says Madame de Stael, that tends to make all minds superstitious. We would rather say, that tends to revive the remembrance of a Moral Providence, and the belief of a connexion between sin and punishment. And this is

more the case when afflictions are sudden, and unlooked for, and great, and repeated, or have any thing that looks peculiar in them. And even good minds have not been able always to resist such impressions and conclusions. Gideon said, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us?" And the pious widow of Zarephath, upon the loss of her child, "said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" The poet tells us, and very truly, "Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face:" but he does *hide* it. The frown is visible enough—sense can see this; but the smile can only be apprehended by faith:—and whose faith is always in exercise?

We may also remark, that gracious souls deprecate nothing so much as censure from God. Therefore they say unto God, "Do not condemn me. To any thing else I bow. But I cannot bear exclusion from thee. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire besides thee. Thy lovingkindness is better than life. In thy presence all my happiness is placed. Use the rod of a father; but let me not feel the sentence of the judge. Correct me; but do not abandon me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Nothing can relieve the gloom of a follower of God, but the light of his countenance. Nothing can make melody in his troubled conscience, but the sound, Go in peace; thy sins be forgiven thee. O seek such an assurance of divine favour before the evil days come, wherein you will say, we have no pleasure in them! If trouble—and man is born to it as the sparks fly upward: if trouble—and you are not for a moment secure, should fall upon you before you have a good hope, through grace, that God is pacified towards you; your condition will be the most pitiable. You must either stupify the mind with Satan's opiates, or faint in the day of adversity.

And let those who have it, preserve and cherish this sense of divine favour and acceptance. Beware of grieving the Holy Spirit of God. Beware, not only of sin; but of the world. Beware of sloth and sleep. Christian slept, and lost his roll out of his bosom. And while Saul slept, he was deprived of his spear and his cruse. When trouble comes, you should not have to seek what, above all things, you want immediately to use. Without his smiles, even in prosperity, your comforts will not cheer you; but in adversity, without his approbation, how heavily will every stroke fall! and how deeply will every wound be felt!

Let me know always that he is near that justifieth me; that all is well with my soul and for eternity; that he will support me under my burden; that though he afflicts me, he loves me; and afflicts me *because* he loves me. And I will say, "Here I am, let him do what seemeth him good."

DECEMBER 15.

"*The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.*"—Rev. vii. 17.

The Lamb. This is an appellation given the Lord Jesus, for two reasons—The one alluding to his personal qualities; such as purity, innocency, gentleness, meekness, patience; for he was led as a lamb to the slaughter. The other, in reference to the design of his death. Abel offered to God a firstling of the flock. Familiar with the use of such a victim, Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Under the Law, a lamb was offered every morning and every evening; and on the Sabbath-day, two were offered in the morning, and two in the evening. There was also the Paschal lamb, whose blood was sprinkled, and whose flesh was eaten, at the deliverance of the Jews from the destroying angels. And "Christ, our passover," says Paul, "is sacrificed for us." And John cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" And it is worthy of our observation, that the name is applied to him, not only in his abasement, but in his exaltation; and that, no less than twenty-eight times, is he called the Lamb, in this Book of the Revelation!

His glory is much spoken of in the Scripture, but never in stronger language than here; "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne"—a station of dignity, dominion, government, full supremacy. Surely, if the sacred writers intended to intimate, that he was a mere creature only, they have expressed themselves in a manner very unguarded and ensnaring—Well; there he is—not only near the throne—but in it—and in the midst of it; in spite of all opposition—Let his enemies tremble, and beware. They may make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb will overcome them: for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. But let his followers boldly profess him. Why should they be ashamed of a leader that is in the midst of the throne? And why do they not rejoice in his salvation? Surely they must, if they love him, for love always exults in the prosperity of its object. Surely every feeling of their heart must prompt the desire; "and blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Well; there he is, in the possession of all power in heaven and in earth, able to save them; to preserve them; to make all things work together for their good.

And as is his greatness, so is his condescension and kindness. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne "shall feed them." The

imagery is pastoral. His people are held forth as sheep; and he performs the office of a shepherd. His concern with them begins here. He seeks after them when lost; he brings them to his fold; he furnishes them with supplies. They can rely on the extensiveness of his care, and the continuance of it; and may individually say, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want—

> 'While he affords his aid,
> I cannot yield to fear:
> Though I should walk through Death's dark shade,
> My Shepherd 's with me there.' "

Nor is this all. When they shall come out of great tribulation; and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—when they shall be before the throne, and serve him day and night in his temple—then—even then, he shall feed them not, as now, by ministers and ordinances; but immediately—not, as now, in the wilderness; but in the heavenly Canaan—not, as now, surrounded with enemies; but where all shall be quietness and assurance for ever—The Lamb shall feed them. He shall be the dispenser, and the source of their happiness. It will flow from his presence and communications—Therefore, Paul desired to depart, to be with Christ, which was far better—"*He* that sitteth on the throne shall *dwell among them.* They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: FOR the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!"

This is the representation of heaven, which poor Burns says, he could never read, from a child, without tears. Oh! let me not admire the description only, but seek after the enjoyment of the blessedness. The language is pathetic, and the scenery is inviting: but is the subject itself more interesting than either! I must be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. I cannot hope to attain hereafter, what I do not desire and delight in now. A natural man may long for a heaven of release from toil and pain—Do I, O my soul, prize a heaven of which Christ is all in all!

DECEMBER 16.

"*And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.*"—1 Sam. xxiii. 16.

WE here see, in the experience of David, that the most eminent of God's people may need encouragement. He was now dejected and dismayed. And we learn from his complaints, in the Book of Psalms, that he was frequently the subject of depression. And to which of the saints recorded in the Scripture can we turn, whose hands never hung down, whose knees never trembled? *These*, we are prone to consider as peculiar in their religious attainments; but *they* also were only enlightened and sanctified in part. They also had in them nature, as well as grace. They too were men of like passions with us, and compassed with infirmities. All those perfect beings now before the throne, were previously in a vale of tears; the spirit indeed willing, but the flesh weak; sometimes rejoicing in God their Saviour; but sometimes saying, "I am cast out of his sight."

In the conduct of Jonathan, we see the duty of real friendship. A friend is born for adversity: and "to him that is afflicted, pity should be shown from his friend." This, however, is not always the case. Many pretenders fail when the day of trial comes; and he who relied upon their attendance, and sympathy, and succour, in trouble, finds his confidence, as Solomon expresses it, "like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint." Yet let us not say, in our haste, all men are liars. See Jonathan, a young prince—surrounded with every indulgence—undertaking, without application, to repair to David to see and serve his friend at the hazard of his life.

In the relief derived from this visit, we learn the advantage of pious intercourse. "Come," said Jonathan, "Come, David, remember God's promise. Is it not faithful and true? Think of the anointing oil Samuel poured upon thy head—Can this be in vain! Who enabled thee to conquer Goliath? Who delivered thee from the paw of the lion and the bear? He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. He saveth, by his right hand, them that put their trust in him, from them that rise up against them. He keeps them as the apple of the eye—Encourage thyself in the Lord thy God."—The address availed—"He strengthened his hand in God." We have a similar instance in the experience of Paul. He had appealed unto Cæsar, and was now approaching the scene of his trial; and his heart was cast down within him: but the brethren from Rome came down as far as Appii-Forum to meet him: "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but wo to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to lift him up." Who, when dull, has not found a Christian visiter a quickening spirit? "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." Who, in sadness and gloom, has not found refreshment and delight from godly communion? Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Who, like Hagar, has not sometimes been ready to expire with thirst, till some minister has opened his eyes, and shown him a well?

And who does not perceive, in the strange circumstances of this consolation, that God can never be at a loss to comfort his followers! He knows, not only how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but to cheer them in it. He is called the God of all comfort. David was now in a state of concealment. Of the few that were with him, no one perhaps knew the state of his mind; for good men, from their regard for the honour of religion, are not always at liberty to lay open many of their distressful feelings. But his God knew what he now suffered; and what his frame of mind required—And what was the instrument he employed? Jonathan: "Saul's son," as it is added—and wisely added. The son of David's bitterest foe. The son, too, that was interested in David's destruction. He was the heir-apparent; and *he* comforts the man who was going to fill a throne, which, by the law of succession, belonged to himself! How wonderful was this! How obviously the work of God! All hearts are in his hand, and he can turn them as he pleases. It is he that gives us favour in the eyes of others; and he can raise us up helpers and friends as unlikely to aid us, as the ravens were to feed Elijah.—Many a situation also, the most improbable, has been made, by his communications, none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven; and, filled with surprise, we have exclaimed with Jacob, "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not!" When are we inaccessible to him? "From the end of the earth," said David, "will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed." And no wonder; he remembered that Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and came to him *into the wood*, and strengthened his hand in God. Did he never come to you in a similar condition? "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence; and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

DECEMBER 17.

"*And a certain Scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*"—Matt. viii. 19, 20.

The God of this world deludes his followers. He conceals from them every difficulty and danger to which they are exposed in his service; and raises in them expectations which he knows will never be fulfilled. Like Jael, he welcomes in, and spreads the couch, and brings forth butter in a lordly dish—but keeps out of sight the hammer and the nails. Take a man, whose object is to gain a name, to become a leader, and to draw away disciples after him: he courts popularity; he flatters; he employs any means; and he accommodates himself to every disposition, as far as he can, without risking discovery. But it was far otherwise with the founder of Christianity. His character was as original as it was excellent. His kingdom was not of this world. His professed object was, to instruct, and save, and bless; and no selfish aim was hidden under it. He showed, in his own person, how little his followers were to mind earthly things; and, in dealing with those who came to him, we see that it was not his concern to draw unprincipled crowds into his train. He would form a peculiar people, who should be actuated by the noblest convictions and purposes. He, therefore, in order to discriminate, applied a test. He warned them to sit down first and count the cost; and assured them at once, that if any man would be his disciple, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and forsake all that he had.

—Our Lord now "saw great multitudes about him;" so that "he gave commandment to depart unto the other side." But as, in the midst of all these, he was stepping towards the ship, "a certain Scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." A noble resolution, if it had been from a good motive. But he apprehended our Saviour to be a temporal Messiah, who, as he appeared able, from his miracle, to carry every thing before him, would soon have promotions at his disposal; and he hoped to gain some of the loaves and fishes. Our Lord well knew his thoughts; and said unto him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head—What say you now?" It is easy to determine what would have been his reply, if he had been sincere and earnest in his application. "O Lord, I come, not to prescribe, but to resign myself entirely to thee. Every thing appears to me less than nothing and vanity, compared with the salvation of my soul; and, if by any means, I can attain it, I shall be satisfied. Whatever, dear and useful as I have deemed it, I cannot retain in following thee, I cheerfully give up. All I fear is, separation from thyself—Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee—Lord, I will follow thee to prison and to death." But, alas! his mean and mercenary temper was now detected. We hear no more of him; he left him, having loved this present world.

But the narrative is recorded for our admonition: and the fact, which by way of trial our Saviour addressed to this pretender, is worthy of our attention. It is very affecting and instructive—It is the indigence of Jesus appearing in the homelessness of his condi

tion. This, as a part, is put for the whole of his abasement: and it is held forth enhanced by contrast. The inferior creatures have dwellings convenient for them, in which they secure themselves, and enjoy repose, and breed up their young. Some of these, man takes as inmates under his own roof: such are the faithful dog, and the feathered songster in the cage. He furnishes also shelter as well as provender, for his cattle. But animals that live at large have also accommodations suited to their kinds. "Foxes have holes." "The young lions gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens." "The high hills are a refuge for the goats, and the rocks for the conies." "The spider taketh hold with her hand, and is in kings' palaces." "The birds of the air have nests." "The eagle mounts up, and" in rocks inaccessible, "maketh her nest on high." "As for the stork, the fir-trees are her house." Some build on the ground; some in dense thickets; some in boughs, depending over the flood; some in isles, secured by water. Some repair to the habitations of men: there the sparrow finds a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. And who, in all this, can help admiring the wisdom and kindness of Providence? His tender mercies are over all his works. As he made all, so he careth for them. He giveth them their meat in due season. He furnishes them with their powers of defence, or flight; and actuates the skill they display in all their surprising economies. And will he disregard his rational offspring? He teacheth *them* more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh them wiser than the fowls of the air. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. How superior is reason to instinct! How boundless in improvement is human ingenuity! What abodes has it provided for us! And with what conveniences, comforts, pleasures, has it replenished them! From hence springs the idea of *home*. We cleave to a place where we received our birth, passed the days of infancy, indulged in the sports of youth; where sleep has refreshed our wearied bodies; and where we have smiled at the descending storm, and the piercing cold.

> "——— Home is
> The loved retreat of peace and plenty; where,
> Supporting and supported, polish'd friends
> And dear relations meet, and mingle into bliss"

Well may the same poet represent the man returning at eve, buried in the drifted snow, as "stung with the thoughts of home."

A homeless condition, therefore, is the most pitiable. And was this the condition of the Lord Jesus? Not absolutely. During his private life he lived with Joseph and Mary, at Nazareth. And after he entered on his public ministry, he had friends, who, like Martha, gladly afforded him the accommodations of their own dwellings. But these advantages were occasional; and were of the nature of hospitality. He never possessed a habitation or an apartment he could call his own. He was born in another man's house; and this was a stable; and he was laid in a manger. How often, when my children were about me, have I said, while viewing my sleeping babe—

> "How much better thou art attended
> Than the Son of God could be,
> When from heaven he descended,
> And became a child like thee!
>
> "Soft and easy is thy cradle—
> Coarse and hard the Saviour lay,
> When his birth-place was a stable,
> And his softest bed was hay!"

How soon was he driven an infant exile into Egypt! Widows ministered to him of their substance. Wearied with his journey, he sat on the well, and said to the woman, Give me to drink. A fish furnished him with money to pay the temple tribute. One night he slept in a fishing-boat. Another he continued all night in prayer in a mountain. We read only once of his riding, though he went about doing good; and this was upon a borrowed ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. He partook of the last passover in a borrowed chamber: he was wrapped in linen not his own, when taken down from the Cross: and was buried in another man's garden, and another man's tomb! What does all this teach us?

DECEMBER 18.

"*And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*"—Matt. viii. 20.

THE fact is affecting; but is it not instructive too?

We may take from it a standard by which to judge of the age and country in which he appeared. Nothing reflects more upon a people, than suffering characters, distinguished by the greatest goodness and usefulness, to want. It will always be a reproach to the Corinthian converts that they allowed such a man as Paul, while preaching and working miracles among them, to work night and day at tent-making. But we love and commend the Philippians, who once and again, when he was in Thessalonica, sent to his necessity. Surely we should have said, men will reverence God's Son. At his coming nobles and princes will offer their mansions and palaces. What preparations are made to receive a superior! Yet the honour of the visit is deemed a recompense for the trouble and expense. But *he* was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came to his own, and his own received him not. What is man? Let Judæa furnish an answer. See the Lord of all; the friend of misery; possessed of every

moral perfection; the image of the invisible God; yet not having "where to lay his head!" But is human nature the same now? Some censure others, and think well of themselves merely because they have not been tried by the same circumstances. "Oh! had we been living there, he should not have been destitute of any accommodation we could have yielded him." Yet you follow the multitude; and the reproach of a name will keep you from owning his truth; and you are backward in giving in the support of his cause. But, by the disposition which you exercise towards his Gospel, and house, and ministers, and members, he judges of his attachment or indifference to himself—He that receiveth you, receiveth me—Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me—Depart.

Pause, and admire the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Do not imagine that he did not *feel* his condition. He was really a partaker of flesh and blood; and knew the sensations of hunger, and weariness, and cold, as well as any other man. But the conveniences and comforts which he required, he often found not. Think of his preaching and traveling all the livelong day; and at night not having where to lay his head! The sensibility of his condition was enhanced by his former state of dignity and enjoyment. We are therefore more affected when we see a prince reduced, than when we behold an individual suffering who was always indigent. Jesus was higher than the kings of the earth, and had given them all their thrones. Heaven had been his dwelling place: and all the angels his attendants; and adorers too. What condescension was here! Let us remember that he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. There was no compulsion: it was all voluntary: not for himself, but for us. And did we deserve such an interposition; such an expensiveness of sacrifice for our comfort? We were viler than the earth; we were enemies by wicked works. Yet he never repented of his engagement; but said, as he was entering all this abasement, Lo! I come! I delight to do thy will! And as his agony approached, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" It was therefore, as the Apostle calls it, Grace; grace the most free and unparalleled. And shall not this love, which passeth knowledge, fix our minds, and fill our hearts? Where is our gratitude, unless we are willing to deny ourselves for him, and to walk worthy of such a divine benefactor unto all well-pleasing! The lower he descended to save me, the higher shall he rise in my esteem for ever. He is always, and altogether lovely; but never so adorable as when his face is marred more than any man's; and he has not where to lay his head.

Let us also learn not to judge of worth by external advantages. True greatness is personal; and does not depend on power, titles, or wealth. Is a man the more valued of God because he has a larger field or a longer purse than his neighbour? Does it give him more virtue or understanding? A fool, a child of the devil, may be set on the high places of the earth; while the Apostles were hungry and naked; and the Son of God had not where to lay his head. While we view him who is higher than the heavens in such an estate, let us learn the vanity of worldly distinctions. Let us see how absurd it is to be vain of a fine house, and splendid furniture, or any of the meanness of the pride of life. Let us despise ourselves, if we have esteemed a man the more for the gold ring and gay clothing; or regarded the poor the less, because he is poor: and remember, that if we had lived in Judæa, we should have courted Pontius Pilate, and shunned Jesus Christ.

Let the Lord's poor take this truth, and apply it, to produce resignation under the privations of life. You talk of penury; but he *was* poor. You have many a comfort you can call your own; but he had not a place where to lay his head. But allowing that your trials were much greater than they are; remember, this is not your rest, and you are rich in faith, and have the honour of conformity to the Lord Jesus. You only know the fellowship of his sufferings. Is it not enough that the servant be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord? Can the common soldier complain when he sees the commander-in-chief sharing the same hardships with himself!

Let it lead us to rejoice in the Saviour's present condition. He that descended is the same also that ascended. He who was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory and honour. He who had not where to lay his head has all power in heaven and in earth. How delightful is this assurance to those who love him! for love glories in the exaltation of its object. It is also interesting to their hopes. They are one with him. And because he lives they shall live also.

DECEMBER 19.

"*I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her.*"—Psalm lxxxvii. 4, 5.

The Jews, partly from their ignorance, and partly from their aversion to Christianity, strangely pervert this passage. They contend that it is designed to intimate that while other places would produce only now and then a

man of note, Jerusalem should abound with all kinds of illustrious characters. But the meaning is this. Zion, in whose name the writer speaks, is foretelling the vocation of the Gentiles; and viewing with ecstasy the accessions that should be made to her of such as should be saved.

Observe to whom she addresses the intelligence—"I will make mention to *them that know me*." That is, to her friends and acquaintances. To such it is natural for us to divulge any thing that is interesting and delightful; as *they* are likely to receive it without envy, and to partake of the pleasure. In the parable, the shepherd having succeeded in his search, not only rejoices himself, but when he cometh home, calls together his neighbours and friends, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. The Church well knew the mind of the godly, that they would not only understand such news, but that it would be to them like cold water to a thirsty soul, or as life from the dead. Thus, in the Acts, when the brethren were informed of the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles—"they glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Observe the places from which these additions should come. "I will make mention to them that know me of *Rahab* and *Babylon:* behold *Philistia*, and *Tyre*, with *Ethiopia*." These are parts put for the whole of the Gentile world; and they are very strikingly put. For all these had been strangers or enemies. Some of them had been her bitterest persecutors, and vilest oppressors. They were all at this time lying in wickedness, enveloped in ignorance, and enslaved to idolatry. But they should cast away their idols; and, beholding the glory of the Church, abandon their enmity, and take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. One should say, I am the Lord's; and another should call himself by the name of Jacob; and another should subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

Mark the change they should experience. "This man was *born there*. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was *born there*." They were born, naturally, in Egypt, Philistia, Tyre, and Babylon: but they were to be born, morally, in Zion; by the Word and Spirit of God. They should become new creatures—They should undergo such a conversion in their minds, and hearts, and lives, as should constitute a new birth. For every subject of divine grace is "born again." And this is properly the date of our existence. We have not lived a moment longer than we have lived "the life of God." "Ye *must* be born again."

By this, therefore, we are to judge whether we are children of Zion, and may rejoice in her King. If we have experienced this change, we are written among the living in Jerusalem. We are enrolled; and though once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, we shall be regarded as citizens, and have all the honour and advantage of natives: "The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was *born* there."

It was formerly deemed a most enviable privilege to be free of some royal and distinguished city. But what was a citizen of Babylon, or of Rome, compared with a denizen of Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem! Yea, were you an apostle, considered only officially, could you prophesy, and work miracles, and raise the dead; and the Saviour met you, elated with your endowments, he would say —"In this rejoice not, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

DECEMBER 20.

"What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?"—John xi. 56.

This was the language of many of the Jews, who had ascended from the country to Jerusalem, to purify themselves against the Passover. It is not easy, or perhaps possible, to determine the principle from which the words were uttered. Perhaps malice uttered them; and they came from persons who wished to discover and apprehend him: for "both the Chief Priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him." Perhaps curiosity uttered them; and they came from persons who were anxious to see whether he had courage enough to appear in public after the threatening of the rulers. Besides this, he was a very extraordinary character, the fame of whose miracles and preaching had spread far and wide; and they naturally desired to see a personage of whom they had heard so much. Perhaps affection uttered them. For, though he was generally despised and rejected of men, there were some who knew his value, and believed him to be the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. They therefore longed for the pleasure, and honour, and advantage of an interview with him at the approaching solemnity. And this is the principle from which, if partakers of divine grace, we are seeking for Jesus. "For Christ our passover," says the Apostle, "is sacrificed for us—Let us therefore keep the feast." And it is in reference to the communion of his body and blood, to which we are going to repair, that we issue the inquiry—"What think ye—that he will not come to the feast?"

This is above every thing desirable. Ordi-

nances are not beneficial, necessarily and of themselves. They derive all their excellency and influence from him. A truth we learn, not only from Scripture, but experience. What a difference, as to light, and life, and joy, do we feel in the same ordinance when he is absent or present! This is nothing to a formalist. *He* is satisfied with the outward signs, and the service itself. But, as to the Christian, intercourse with Christ is the one thing needful. He feels it pleasing to hold communion with the saints: but what he principally wants is fellowship with the Saviour—He alone can fill them all: and without him they would have nothing for each other, or for themselves.

But the inquiry implies doubt. Doubt has two aspects and bearings—the unlikely, and the probable—the one exciting fear, and the other encouraging hope. Let us look at each.

—What is there then to awaken our suspicion and fear, that he will *not* be at the feast? And is there not much every way? Without going back to our unconverted days, how have we lived since we have made a profession of his name? Have we walked as those who are not of the world? Have we borne his corrections without murmuring? Have we been grateful under his mercies? Has he lived in our warmest thoughts? Has he been the chief theme of our conversation? Have we not frequently been ashamed of his cause? Have we recommended him earnestly to others? After all this, how can we expect that he will honour us with his company? Should *we* thus honour any fellow-creature who had treated us as we have treated him? But the cause of alarm is increased when we consider not only our conduct at large, but our behaviour towards him with regard to this very feast itself! Have we not suffered trifling excuses to keep us away, when he has been there waiting for us; but waiting in vain? Have we not approached it with the indifference of custom and formality; though angels were there intensely desiring to look into these things? Have we not passed through the divine memorials, mystically eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God, with the exercise of no more faith in his death, or love to our brethren, than in an ordinary meal?—We need not go on. O blessed Jesus! when we consider all this—and this *only*—we may well question whether thou wilt—ever meet with us again.

—But let us look at the other side. Let us see, not only what there is to excite fear, but to encourage hope. Now to induce us to conclude that he will be at the feast—We have his character, his disposition. "His heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love." "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." We have his past dealings with us—He has tried us, but not forsaken us. We have been often cast down, but never cast off. We have his promise—"Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." In a word, we are sure of the blessing—if we seek it: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

But is it possible to ascertain when he is with us at the feast? It is. As he is not there corporeally, we cannot apprehend him with our bodily senses: but, as he is there spiritually, we may apprehend him spiritually. They who are new creatures, have new senses, which are exercised to discern both good and evil. They have ears to hear his voice. They have eyes to see his glory. They have a holy taste, and holy feelings. Thus his people can be sensible of his arrival. Indeed, he *says*, "I am come." He is not inactive when there. "While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." There are impressions and effects which cannot be mistaken, owing to their holy, humbling, heavenly influence. The assurance he has of communion with the Lord in his ordinances, is not evidence for others; but to the believer himself it affords satisfaction; and he is neither to be ridiculed or reasoned out of the conviction—He has the witness in himself.

DECEMBER 21.

"*Show me wherefore thou contendest with me*"
Job x. 2.

A GOOD man perceives and acknowledges the hand of God in his afflictions. Job sees God contending with him. Though his sufferings were principally from creatures, he said, "The Lord hath taken away." "Thou hast taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces." Whatever may form the twigs of the rod, God is the chastiser—He has a right to correct, and can never err in using it. To realize this, is the way, not only to prevent despondency, but to repress all murmuring passions. This satisfied Eli: "It is the Lord, let *him* do what seemeth good." "Oh!" says the gardener, as he passes down the walks, and is priding himself on the beds and borders which he has so carefully cultivated; "who removed that plant? who gathered this flower!" His fellow-servant says, "The master." And he is dumb, and opens not his mouth, because *he* did it.

Again—God has an end to answer by his contention with us. It is not the display of his sovereignty. There is a distinction between bestowing favours, and inflicting penalties. If a judge condemned a man, to show that he *was* a judge; or a king imprisoned a

man, to show that he *was* a king; every one would cry out against them: but they would be more than justified in employing such measures for the display of justice, and for the advantage of ensample. Paul conveys a degree of censure where we should have looked only for tenderness: The fathers of our flesh chastened us for a few days after their own pleasure. But God, says he, always does it for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Why is the ship in danger? Because Jonah has fled from the presence of the Lord; and the wind is sent after him. Why does Israel flee before the men of Ai? There is an Achan in the camp. Thus God explains the thing himself: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." He therefore does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. There is some sin indulged; some duty neglected; some idol adored. But his aim may be, not only to rebuke for actual evil; but to hedge up our way with thorns, to keep us from the forbidden ground, towards which we are advaneing; or to prune us, as vines, that we may bring forth more fruit.

—God alone can discover his own intentions in his rebukes. In doing this, we are not to suppose that he will employ miracles; or speak in an audible voice from heaven; or by a sudden impulse. He aets in a way suited to the nature and improvement of a rational and moral being. He may, therefore, in showing us his design, use even an enemy. When Shimei cursed David, David considered him as much sent of God to reprove him, as Nathan had been. The will of God may be made known by the admonitions of a pious friend, who sees what we overlook, from habit, or self-love. We should therefore be thankful when the righteous smite us; and not deem them enemies because they tell us the truth. Sometimes the nature and circumstanees of the affliction itself proclaim the secret; and we can see the cause in the effect; the sin in the punishment. The faithful word, read or preached, comes home to our case: and conscience cries, Thou art the man. Sometimes the difficulty of discovery is great. But if we address ourselves to the Father of lights, sincerely and importunately, to show us wherefore he contendeth with us, we shall not seek in vain. The promise given to Jeremiah shall be fulfilled in us; "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

—And very desirable it is that we should know why He contendeth with us. Indeed a good man cannot be satisfied without it. For while the wicked are only anxious to escape from trouble, he wishes to profit by it. He desires this knowledge, therefore, not to gratify curiosity, but to enable him to justify God in his dispensations—and to know how to pray—and to exercise the graces of the condition he is in—and to apply to present duty—and that he may confess whatever is wrong, and watch against it in future: saying, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement: I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." For there is a tenderness in the conscience of a renewed man that readily responds to God. No sooner did our Lord turn and look upon Peter, that he went out and wept bitterly.

As for an unconverted man to ask God, in his affliction, to show wherefore he contends with *him*, it is absurd. It would defeat the end of his suffering, which is not to make him leave a particular sin, but all sin; and to draw him into a new course, and a new state.

But perhaps, though living in sin, you say, God is not contending with you. So much the worse. He is saying, "They are joined to idols; let them alone." Though he spares you now, he will deal with you hereafter. And the longer the arrear, the severer the reckoning. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

DECEMBER 22.

"*And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable.*"—Isaiah lviii. 13.

This is to characterize the heirs of an exceeding great and precious promise here subjoined. They are to be known, not by their observance of the Lord's day only; but by their endeared and exalted regard for it—They call the Sabbath a delight; and the holy of the Lord, honourable. And what reason they have for this will appear from its leading aspects and bearings.

Let us connect it with the brute creation. Any thing that tends to make them happier will be pleasing to a benevolent mind, especially since we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain; and was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Though man is the lord of this lower world, and all creatures are put under his dominion, he is not to oppress and enslave them. If his power over them be abused, and his tender mercies towards them be cruel, God will resent it. These helpless beings are his creatures, and his care. I love to hear him telling the fretful prophet, as a reason why he spared Nineveh, that there were in it not only "more than six score thousand persons that could not discern be-

tween their right hand and their left," but "also much cattle." I love to hear him forbidding the Jewish husbandman to muzzle the ox while treading out the corn. I love to read the tenderness of the Fourth Commandment—"That thine ox and thine ass may rest, as well as thou." If the brutes had reason, they would all bless God for the Sabbath.

We may view the Sabbath in reference to the business of life. In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread, till thou return to the dust, was the sentence passed upon man for sin: but, in judgment, God remembers mercy. Who could bear incessant application and toil? Some change is obviously wanting, to unbend the mind and the body. And man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening; when he returns home and retires to rest; and *his* sleep is sweet, whether he eats little or much. But this is not all. The Sabbath furnishes a fixed pause; a needful relaxation. Those who are in easy circumstances, and, like the lilies of the field, toil not, neither do they spin, feel little interest in the Sabbath, on this account. But let them think of thousands of their fellow-creatures. Let them think of those who, by mental pursuits and professional engagements, get their bread by the sweat of the brain. Let them think of those who sit at the loom, stand at the forge, work in the field, drudge under ground. What a relief, what a privilege, is one day in seven, felt by them! How dull would be the monotony of their time, without the break and variety of the Sabbath! What a drag would their life be, if they were to carry their loads unloosened even to the grave! But the day of repose returns: the worn labourer lays down his burden; stretches his limbs; refreshes himself by cleanliness and change of raiment; and after six days, during which he is almost reduced to the brute, on the seventh he feels himself to be a man. And, O ye rigid, if not sanctimonious souls, envy not the sons and daughters of drudgery and confinement a little of the fresh air of heaven, which you, perhaps, can always breathe! nor be too severe with those who only once a week can look forth, and glance on the beauties of Nature—the very works, too, of Him, who ordained the Sabbath!

This day also contributes to the harmony of families. The members may be much divided and dispersed through the week, and have few or slender opportunities of social intercourse. But the Sabbath brings them more fully together; and produces and cherishes those feelings which endear and unite them relatively; and dispose them, by love, to serve one another. Persons and families are especially among the common people, always unkind, and rude, and savage, both in their temper and manners, where the Sabbath is neglected. But they are respectful, and humane, and tender, where it is observed; because they see each other to advantage, and mingle under moral and religious impressions, which, though not always powerful enough to sanctify, contribute to soften and civilize.

The Sabbath is also a period of devotion and reflection. If we are godly, we shall not go through the week without God. Some pious thoughts and feelings will blend with our busy concerns. But week days are, in a sense, worldly ones; and even our allowed contact with earthly things tends to impair our heavenly impressions, and to make us forgetful of our highest good. We want a day of retreat from this world, that we may think of another, and have opportunities to compare the claims of the various objects that court our hearts. We want a day of silence from the passions, to consider more deeply the principles and motives of religion; and to have excited, and carried upward, those afflictions which cleave unto the dust. To a man concerned to advance in the divine life, how welcome is the return of a day, all for his soul and eternity! in which, by waiting on the Lord, his strength is renewed, and his heart is enlarged; and he obtains fresh preparations to meet the temptations, the duties, and the troubles of life.

Again: without the aid of such a day, how would even the face of religion be maintained in the community at large? We may learn from an enemy. When the French wished to destroy every thing like Christianity, they were wise enough to know how much the Sabbath stood in their way; and therefore abolished it, and established their decades. Let any one imagine the Lord's day given up for a time in our own country. The effect would be a thousand times more injurious to the interests of piety and morality than all the writings and attempts of infidelity. Let this fence of every thing sacred and useful be broken down, and what an inundation of ignorance and vice of every kind would overspread the land! It is in the services of this day the rich and the great are reminded of their accountableness; their dependence on God; and their being only on a level with those below them, in their origin and end. This they are too prone to forget: but once in the week the master is a servant; the king a subject; the judge a criminal, crying for mercy. And as to the poor and working classes, how little time have they for religious exercises but the Sabbath! It is then, principally, the Bible is taken down from the shelf; and the child, placed between the knees, is heard to read it. Then the children of our Sunday schools cry Hosannas in our temples. Then the family goes to the

house of God in company. Then the poor have the Gospel preached unto them; and the common people, unless the preacher misrepresents him by his fineness, again hear the Saviour gladly. How, without these auxiliaries, would a sense of the Divine presence, and the moral providence of God, and of a future state, be kept alive on the minds of the multitude? Is not all the knowledge of religion thousands possess derived from what they read and hear on the Sunday?

And how impressive and interesting is the Sabbath as the chief period of divine operations! How distinguished will it be in the annals of eternity! How many thousands, how many millions, on this day have been awakened, enlightened, converted, made new creatures! What triumphs has the Cross gained over the powers of darkness! What noble schemes and enterprizes, for the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind, have taken their rise from some impression in the closet, or excitement in the church, on this accepted time, this day of salvation!

Nor is it less delightful and honourable as an emblem of heaven, and a preparation for it. Philip Henry would often say, at the close of his Sabbath devotions—Well: if this be not heaven, it must be the way to it. Yes; it is then Christians often feel themselves, like Jacob in his vision, at the gate. They have earnests and foretastes of the glory to be revealed. Perhaps they are never so willing as then to go. Many of them have wished to be released on this day; and many have been gratified. But if they do not leave on the earthly Sabbath, they enter on the heavenly one. For there remaineth a rest, a sabbatising, as the word is, to the people of God. And what an exchange for the better! Here we worship with a few; and these, like ourselves, are imperfect. Here we groan, being burdened; and if we are not weary of our divine work, we are soon wearied in it. And, when—satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord, we can say,

"My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,"

the world calls us down, and leads us out into its cares, and griefs, and dangers, again. Oh! why do we not sing—

"Thy earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love;
But there's a nobler rest above:
To this our lab'ring souls aspire,
With ardent pangs and strong desire.

"No more fatigue, no more distress,
Nor sin, nor hell, shall reach the place;
No groans to mingle with the songs
That warble from immortal tongues.

"O long-expected day! begin;
Dawn on these realms of wo and sin:
Fain would we leave this weary load,
And sleep in death to rest with God!"

DECEMBER 23.

"*As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee.*"—Psalm lxxxvii. 7.

THIS is spoken of Zion; and shows us the *joy*, and the *attachment*, of her inhabitants.

The joy is expressed in language according with the forms of service in the Jewish worship. They had, in addition to the praises of individuals and families, orders of men, established expressly for the performance of psalmody in the Temple: some vocal, and some instrumental—"As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there." The meaning is—That Zion, which the world considers the metropolis of sadness and gloom, should be the residence of cheerfulness and mirth; or, in other words, that the Church of God should abound with spiritual joy and gladness. This joy may be considered two ways. First, as promised: and so it is to be viewed as a privilege; and we are to look after it in the history and experience of his people. And if we turn—and this is the fairest way, to those whom God has himself described in his Word, we shall find them distinguished by nothing more than this experience. They walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Though they had losses and afflictions, yet, believing, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.—Secondly, as commanded. Thus they are enjoined to shout aloud for joy; to rejoice in the Lord always; to be filled with the Spirit; speaking to themselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing, and making melody in their heart to the Lord. And thus it becomes a duty: and, as such, we are bound to seek and to preserve it; to study the grounds of it; to guard against every thing that would invade and injure it; to endeavour, by all means, to increase our joy in the Lord; and never *refuse* to be comforted. All must be singers and players on instruments here. All cannot perform equally well; but all must do something, and pray and strive, to show that the religion of Christ is able to make its possessors happy; that it can set their roving hearts at rest; that it can enable them to dispense with the dissipations of the world; that it can sustain them under the trials of life, and raise them above the fears of death; and thus adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.

But here is attachment as well as joy—"All my springs are in thee." No affection was ever more sincere than that which the pious Jews bore to their native land. Jerusalem was the source of their hope and glory; the circle and the centre of all the endearments of life. They breathed out their very soul when they said, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces."

They deemed nothing too dear to be parted with, for its ornament or defence. In its welfare, they forgot their personal and relative sorrows: and when it was taken, and destroyed, they abandoned themselves to grief, hung their harps upon the willows, and felt life a burden. Even in its reduced state, they took "pleasure in her stones, and favoured the dust thereof"—Each of them sighing, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." And is there less intenseness of regard in Christians, towards Jerusalem which is above, and free, and the mother of us all? No—all their springs are there—All that refreshes me—can each of them say; all that revives, all that enlivens, all that inspires—"all my springs are in thee."

Where are all the springs of a worldly man? In the world. To all his interests there, he is alive: his heart is glad when his corn and wine increase; and his joy fails with them. His losses are the taking away of his gods; and what has he more! But what is the experience of the Christian? In the word of God, and the ordinances of his house, and communion with his people, and the consolations of his Spirit; here it is, says he, I find my heaven! If this cannot touch and animate him, nothing, for the time, can. On the other hand, this can make him joyful, even in tribulation. This seems to indemnify him under every earthly disappointment. What is it, says he, that my schemes fail, if His flourish? Yea, in spiritual darkness, and when he is ready to conclude that he has no part or lot in the matter, and that his heart cannot be right in the sight of God, his countenance is illumined, and the tear of joy starts into his eye, when he hears that the word of the Lord hath free course and is glorified; that sinners are fleeing to the Saviour, as doves to their windows; that the order to Zion is issued, Enlarge the place of thy tent; lengthen her cords, strengthen her stakes. In this, says he, I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. And so, when there are apostacies and backslidings, and professors cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, he is "sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it is his burden." And his fear, as well as his hope, and his grief, as well as his pleasure, show where the attraction of his heart lies. And if any thing is to be done for Zion, he feels a courage that is not natural to him. His tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. His hand gets suddenly into his pocket; and, to his power, yea, and beyond his power, he is willing to communicate; and his zeal, as well as all his other feelings, justify his saying, "All my springs are in thee."

DECEMBER 24.

"Through the tender mercy of our God; where by the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."—Luke i. 78, 79.

Well said David, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" He does this in a thousand ways; and each of us may acknowledge, with Job, "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." But what a visit is here! Twice does Zacharias, under different allusions, expressly mention it in his thanksgiving song. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Observe the image under which he views the coming of the Saviour—"The dayspring from on high." The springing of the day is produced, and only can be produced, by the rising of the sun. There is only one sun in nature. And there is only one Sun in grace. And to them that fear my Name, said God, by the prophet Malachi, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.

See the state in which he finds us—"Sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." Darkness is ignorance. Some ignorance is of little importance: but here we are destroyed for lack of knowledge. The darkness is connected with the shadow of death—a state of terror, and danger, and nearness to perdition; for the shadow cannot be far from the reality. It is not only vain, but injurious to deny the truth of this representation. Every thing concurs to prove it. And, without the admission of it, Christianity must be needless and absurd.

But see the benefit he is designed to communicate—"To give light" to them that are in darkness and the shadow of death. Accordingly, his coming has shed a lustre upon every subject interesting to our duty and welfare. So that every individual under the Gospel knows far more than all the Heathen philosophers united. And also far more than the most illuminated among the Jews.—Hence our Saviour turned unto his disciples, and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

It is therefore called, not only "the true light;" but, "a great light." It has two pro-

perties. It is *practical*. It is "to guide our feet." We were "sitting" before; inactive, like persons in the dark, and afraid to move: but when the light comes, we are set in motion. The doctrine of Christ is not a mere speculation. He that receives it feels an influence resembling that of the orb of day; which is vital, as well as enlightening—He walks in the Spirit. In the fear of the Lord. In the truth. It is also *blessed*. It is to guide our feet "into the path of peace." There is something very pleasing in the word Peace, as it intends reconciliation; and especially reconciliation with God. And God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. And being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This peace is essential to every other blessing: and every other blessing is sure to follow it. The word, therefore, is often used for every kind of good and of happiness. It is finely expressed by the Apostle, "We who have believed do enter into rest:" and yet more fully by David, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy Name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted."

But what is the source of all this blessedness? "The tender mercy of our God." As we are guilty and condemned creatures, every gift we enjoy must be from mercy. This is true, of our daily and outward comforts; and therefore Jacob calls them all "mercies;" and acknowledges that he is not worthy of the "least" of them. How true is it, then, that not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us!—Neither are we to imagine, that God was made merciful by the incarnation and sufferings of Christ. It is from injudicious representations of this kind, that the enemies of the atonement are furnished with their strongest objection. In the Scripture, we are told that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. What he requires, he provides. He would not pardon Job's friends but through his intercession. But he prescribed his prayer, with sacrifice, for the very purpose, and accepted it. Thus we are "justified freely by his grace, *through* the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Let us bless God for this tender mercy.—"God is the Lord, which hath showed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Let us improve the advantages it has afforded us; and walk as children of the light. Let us pray that his way be made known on earth, and his saving health among all nations.

DECEMBER 25.

"*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Beth-lehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.*"—Luke ii. 1—6.

The birth of Christ is so wonderful and important, that every circumstance attending it is worthy of our attention, and capable of improvement. We are here informed of the *time*, and the *place*.

As to the *time*, it was under the reign of Augustus. Luke could not have distinguished it by a more illustrious mark, than the name of a man, the greatest prince then in the world; as he governed the Roman empire, which had extended itself over the largest and fairest portions of the inhabited earth. What is related indefinitely, is liable to dispute and mistake; whereas, particularity tends to gain credence, and renders falsehood easier of detection. Hence, the Evangelist mentions a remarkable fact attending the period: "It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed;" and adds, "And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." Here, however, a difficulty occurs, which Infidelity, always alive to the worst of causes, and feeling the paucity and poverty of its resources, has readily laid hold of.

It must be granted that Cyrenius, as Josephus, and all the Greek and Latin historians, agree, was not governor of Syria till eleven years after. But, first, it is supposable, that, though he was not the actual governor, he presided on this occasion, by a special commission from Augustus. This agrees with the history of the Emperor, which shows us, that, in several instances, he sent his particular friends to superintend the enrolment, without leaving it to the care of the ordinary governors of the province. Did not David do the same when he wished to number the people? There were rulers over all the tribes of Israel; yet he sent Joab, who went through all the land, and brought him the result at the end of nine months and twenty days. Secondly; Dr. Campbell renders it, "And this enrolment *first took effect* when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." Though our version reads 'taxing,' it is in the margin 'enroling.' There was some difference between these. For though the registering was

generally with a view to the taxing; yet the latter did not always immediately follow the former; it only laid the foundation for it, by showing the Emperor the number and wealth of his subjects, whenever he chose to demand soldiers or money. Now, though the decree for enrolment was issued eleven years before, it was not *acted upon* till Cyrenius *was* governor of Syria; and the Roman power, on the expulsion of Archelaus from Judea, first levied the tax on the Jewish people. We have a similar instance in our own history. William the Conqueror wished to make a survey of the kingdom. This was done in what is called the Doomsday Book, and which is still extant. It was *six years in making, in England only: and no payment of taxes was made upon it till twelve years after.* Either of these solutions is perfectly satisfactory: and there is no inconsistency between them—the one does not invalidate the other. And when to this we add, that the fact itself was notorious; and that Luke could not be deceived, and must have known that he could not be misunderstood at the time; we see another instance of the weakness of Infidel objections. But Luke mentions this affair, not only to authenticate the truth of his narrative, but the Messiahship of Christ. His coming had not only been foretold, but the time of it. We allude to the prophetical declaration of the dying Jacob. When speaking of Judah, he said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." That is—when he should come, the supreme power should be dislodged from their possession. And here we see the accomplishment of it: for the supreme power had now fallen into the hands of Herod the Idumean, who was exercising his vile tyranny under the favour of the Roman sovereign, master of Syria and Palestine.

The *place* was Bethlehem. It is called the City of David, because there David was born. But the word city, which the Jews used so differently from us, should not mislead us. It was only a small village, in which nothing had occurred to aggrandize it. Here he was brought forth, and not in Jerusalem, or Rome, or any other illustrious place. Was this to intimate, that his kingdom was not of this world? What cannot ennoble greatness, greatness can ennoble. How has the birthplace of the Mantuan Bard been noticed! How many cities contended for the honour of Homer's birth! The birth of Jesus instantly drew to this village a new star, and sages from the east, and the angel of the Lord, and a multitude of the heavenly host; and has made it to be remembered in all generations. Therefore, said the prophet Micah, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." That he was to be born here, was known and expected, not only by the Chief Priests and Scribes, as we see in their answer to Herod; but also by even the common people, who argued against him, when they supposed that he was *not* born there—"Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

But let us not forget the occasion of the event. For it was, humanly speaking, the most unlikely thing in the world, that Jesus should be born here. For Bethlehem was not the place of Joseph's residence; but Nazareth, in Galilee. But, the decree requiring that every one should repair to his own patrimonial city to be enrolled, Joseph being of the house and lineage of David, goes up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, in Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, and Mary with him, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, waiting for his registry, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered! Mary thought of nothing but accompany Joseph. Joseph thought of nothing but obeying the order of the Governor. The Governor thought of nothing but the mandate of the Emperor. The Emperor only obeyed his vanity and pride: and yet all these ignorantly, but unitedly, conduced to fulfil the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. How freely men can act! and yet how necessarily! How real, and yet inexplicable, is the concord between human liberty and the certainty of events? What is contingent where Divine veracity is concerned! How impossible is it that the Scriptures can be broken! How wonderful is the providence of God! By what methods does it conduct its plans to their completion! How easily, and yet how uncontrollably, does it bend to its pleasure all the dispositions and movements of creatures, who, like men in a boat, look one way and row another!

DECEMBER 26.

"*And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. and they were sore afraid.*"—Luke ii. 8, 9.

Two classes of men were led to Bethlehem, to witness the new-born Messiah—The wise men from the East, and the shepherds. The former were versed in the works of Nature. They were especially astronomers and star-gazers; and God conducts them by a star. The latter were Jews. They had the

Scriptures in their hands: and these were directed by an angel. God has various methods of manifesting himself to his creatures: but none of them are arbitrary. They all evince his "wisdom and prudence," and are adapted to the state and circumstances of the beings with whom he has to do.

Angels are all ministering spirits. And if they attend the heirs of salvation, how much more the Author of it! If they wait on the servants, how much more on the Son, who is Lord of all! When he bringeth his first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. He was seen of angels.

—We might have expected that this glorious messenger would have been sent to persons of rank and authority; to the rulers; to the doctors of the law; to the ministers of the sanctuary; to Herod; to the High Priest. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Man judgeth after the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh to the heart. He is no respecter of persons. The distinctions of life, which, owing to folly, are the sources of so much pride to some, and envy to others, are nothing to Him—He is equally "nigh unto *all* them that call upon him," whatever be their outward condition: as the sun shines in the valley, as well as on the hill. It was to these shepherds the angel of the Lord appeared. And may not this be considered an intimation of the persons for whom the Dispensation was principally designed, and by whom it would be chiefly received? Hence we read, "The poor have the Gospel preached unto them"—"The common people heard him gladly"—"Have any of the rulers believed on him?"—"Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Not that the rich and great are excluded. And there always have been a few who have humbled themselves, to be exalted. But "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

We have much reason to conclude, that these shepherds were among the number of those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. While many of their countrymen, in ceiled houses, were seeking their consolation in the world, they, like Simeon, were waiting for the Consolation of Israel. Perhaps at this very moment they were silently musing: or perhaps conversing with each other (for they were obviously together,) "when the kingdom of God should come;" and sighing out the words of David, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad"—When, "lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them! and the glory of the Lord shone round about them!"

And this angel, by his example, teaches us, however much we may be placed above them, not to overlook the poor, nor refuse to visit them: especially God's poor; for they are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him. It is a character of the citizen of Zion, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned, however high: but he honours them that fear the Lord, though they may not have the gold ring and the gay clothing.

The sacred historian has not failed to tell us how these men were engaged at the time of their being thus distinguished. They were in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. Thus they were abiding in their calling, and faithfully and actively discharging the duties of it. Never mind how humble your occupations may be—

> "Honour, and shame, from no condition rise:
> Act well your part—there all the honour lies."

Be attentive and diligent, and you are useful and respectable. *They* ought to blush, who do nothing, or have nothing to do. Their mode of living is as inconsistent with the life of a Christian required in the Gospel, as a life of vice. The tree that bringeth forth no *good* fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire. The servant that hid his Lord's talent in a napkin, did not abuse it; but because he was an unprofitable servant, he was a wicked one, and therefore punished. The case of these shepherds is not a solitary one. Go through the Scriptures, and make out a list of all those whom God favoured and dignified with his visits; and show me one among them all, that was a drone in the community, or not properly and usefully employed. *Other* beings are more likely to appear to the useless and idle. "Our idle days," says Bishop Hall, "are the Devil's busy ones." And Watts says,

> "For Satan finds some mischief still,
> For idle hands to do."

It was well said by an old Puritan, "I find diligence the best preservative from temptation: for when Satan comes to me with his proposals, I say to him, I cannot attend to thee now—I am so busy."

"The labour of the righteous tendeth to life." "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

DECEMBER 27.

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass."—Luke ii. 15.

This was the language of the shepherds. And it was not a vain curiosity that led them. While keeping their flocks by night, the angel of the Lord appeared to them; and said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger." This they considered, as it really was, an order to repair thither, to ascertain and report the fact. And they would have set off instantly. But there suddenly descended a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will toward men. We know not how long this melody continued. Yet who can wonder at their staying till it was over! But no sooner were the angels gone away into heaven, than "the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass." Let us accompany them; and contemplate a scene which will induce us to exclaim, with Moses, on a very marvellous, but very inferior occasion; "Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?"

In this thing which is come to pass, we behold a very striking display of divine truth. The coming of the Messiah was called, "*The* truth of God." Many things evince the Divine veracity: but this was the main pledge. It was the chief promise ever given to man. It was also the earliest assurance: it was given as early as the Fall. And what a length of time the assurance seemed to hang in suspense! A year—a hundred years—a thousand years—another thousand, and another, and another rolled away before the Seed of the woman appeared! Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail for evermore? But at the end of four thousand years, it was proclaimed, His councils of old are faithfulness and truth. How many also were, what we may call the minute parts of the promise. It was foretold that he should descend from a particular nation—the nation of the Jews: a particular tribe—the tribe of Judah: a particular family—the family of David: a particular mother—a virgin. On how many things does the veracity of God now depend, the failure of any one of which would prove him a liar. The place of his residence was foretold—it was Bethlehem. The prophecy had been recorded for ages, and was acknowledged at the time of his birth. But how many things were necessary to this; and how accidental seemed the fulfilment! For Joseph and Mary were residing at Nazareth. And had not Judæa been under the Roman dominion; and had not Cæsar Augustus proudly wished to know the number and wealth of his subjects; and had Mary been delivered a few days sooner or later: he would have been born elsewhere, and the word of God would have been of none effect. All these occurrences appear casual, and they were so to the parties themselves; but not to God; he knows all his works from the beginning. All these events seemed loosely connected: but they were links making an adamantine chain. The truth of God was the pivot on which all turned: the centre in which all united; the end to which all referred. Let us see here, not only how willing, but how able he is to accomplish his word; and be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Let no apparent delay, no opposing difficulties, no interfering interests, affect our minds. His purpose is secretly, yet uncontrollably, moving on; and the most unlikely instruments are contributing to its execution. How much depends on our confidence in the truth of God!

We see, in the thing which has come to pass, a wonderful combination. A combination of natures—I admit his humanity; and why should I question his divinity? I find many things ascribed to him, which cannot belong to him as God; and I find others ascribed to him, which cannot pertain to him as man: and here is the solution of the difficulty—"God was manifest in the flesh." A combination of grandeur and abasement. Whose birth could have been more obscure and degrading? What welcome was given him? What preparation was made for him? "The world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." A poor young female was his mother; a stable his chamber; a manger his cradle, because there was no room at the inn. But whose birth was ever so glorious? Ye gods of the earth, bring forth your first-born; but no new star sparkles over where the young child is. No wise men come miraculously from the East to worship him. No angel comes down. No heavenly choir sing his birth. No command is given, Let all the angels of God worship him. No spirit of prophecy breathes inspiration. No Simeon waits for him as the Consolation of Israel. No Anna speaks of him to all those who look for redemption.

We see also a prodigy of benevolence. Every thing says, Behold a love that passeth knowledge. His former condition—he *was* rich, and *became* poor. His independence

and choice: he was not *constrained* to enter such a state—Lo! I *come*, says he: he *gave* his life a ransom for us. The principle that moved him—it was not our desert; but his own *mercy*. He came into the world to save *sinners:* he died for the ungodly: in his love and pity he redeemed us. His not waiting for our application, arising from a sense of our need of him—His engaging, in foresight of all the degree and extent of his sufferings—His going through the whole, without repenting of the expensive undertaking—His accomplishing it with delight.

Here, also, we see an example for our imitation. Did he thus despise worldly distinctions? and shall we admire them? shall we seek great things for ourselves?—place such a Christian by the side of the manger! Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. Shall we find it difficult to condescend to men of low estate, and to exercise self-denial in doing good? "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Did he not only stoop so low, but suffer so much for us; and shall we not be willing to endure any privations, and incur any sacrifices, for our brethren? "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour."

Great as this thing is which has come to pass, there are many who will refuse to take a step to see it. Even at the very festival, which is the commemoration of it, they will be found any where rather than at Bethlehem. They will be attracted to every thing, rather than to that sight, which the shepherds left their flocks, and made haste to see; which the Eastern sages came such a vast distance to behold; and which drew all heaven down to earth. Some, while they observe the day by a freedom from labour, not only neglect, but insult the subject of it; and, by intemperance and riot, revive the works of the Devil, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy.

But let us call off our attention from the little, debasing, vexing, defiling things of the world, and repair to the Infant of Bethlehem, the desire of all nations. Let us give him the glory which is due unto his holy Name; and say, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Let us behold in him provision made for our recovery, the most suitable to our wants, and the most adequate to our relief; and placed entirely within our reach, let us embrace him; and exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him: we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation."

And let our zeal and gratitude be equal to our joy. And let us follow the shepherds not only in our going, but in our return—"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child"—"And they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen."

DECEMBER 28.

"*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*"—Luke i. 6.

THIS worthy couple are known as the father and mother of a very illustrious personage; of whom the Judge of all said, "Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." But while Zacharias and Elisabeth derive renown from their son, they are worthy of attention, personally considered. Though not distinguished by worldly grandeur, they were great in the sight of the Lord; and, though their names are not recorded in the annals of national history, their characters will be had in everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures of truth. Five things are here said of their piety.

—It was sincere—They were righteous *before God.* Many are righteous before men, who only look on the outward appearance: but the Lord, who searcheth the heart, and sees actions in their motives, disowns them. A large assembly may be convened together, and be engaged in the same exercises; but they only worship him, who worship him in spirit and in truth. What are we in his estimation? He that judgeth us is the Lord.

—It was practical—They *walked in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.* Divine truth is important; yet, if we know these things, happy are we only if we do them. Practice is nothing without principle: and what proof have we of the reality and excellency of principle without practice? "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." We do not undervalue experience; but the Scripture requires something more than good feelings—"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." A good conscience will always be accompanied with a good conversation. He is a vain man who says he has faith and hath not works—Can such faith save him?

—It was impartial—They walked in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. None are universally wicked. Vices are often inconsistent with each other. Prodigality opposes avarice, and covetousness complains of extravagance. All do something, for conscience must be appeased: but they are determined in their *selections* by the easiness of the thing, or its relation to some one of their interests. They have no regard to the will of God; for if their observance sprang from a regard to his pleasure, this would lead them to avoid every thing which he has forbidden, and to inquire after every thing he has enjoined. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

—It was irreproachable—They walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, *blameless*. It is not said they were sinless. The subjects of divine grace will always have enough to bewail before God, instead of saying, I have attained, I am already perfect. But it is a mercy (and this is possible) to be preserved from those falls which injure our reputation and influence; and also from those imprudences which draw upon a man the reproach of folly or weakness, when he is not taxable with sin; and from those veerings of opinion, which are yet consistent with some degree of fixed principle in higher things. It is well when our good cannot be evil spoken of; and we are without offence till the day of Christ.

—It was mutual—They were *both* righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. This is not the case in every family. In some houses there is no fear of God in either master or mistress, father or mother, husband or wife. In others there is one of these relations godly, and only one. They who are joined together by marriage, are not one in the Lord. This difference may be accounted for three ways. One of the parties may have been called after their affinity—neither of them knowing God at the time of contracting it. Or one of the parties may have deceived the other—and some are guarded and crafty—and those who are upright themselves, are generally free from suspicion. Or the religious individual was perhaps (how strange!) careless upon this subject; and did not feel religion, in his choice, the one thing needful; or was bribed against his conviction, by other things. The two former cases deserve pity; but the third justifies censure. And his error will correct him. For nothing can be more desirable and important than the godliness of *both* parties. How near is the relation! How constant and influential the intercourse! How lamentable, in a course where we need every assistance, to meet with impediments! How can two walk together, except they be agreed?—And are there servants? are there children? Each of the superiors will have their adherents. And it is not difficult to conclude, from the depravity of human nature, which will be more readily followed—the one who would lead into the world—or the one who would lead out of it.

But the case would be more awful still, if one of the parties was an official character—Surely a Zacharias should have an Elisabeth. What disgrace and injury may result from the union of a preacher with an irreligious or indiscreet companion! The Apostle therefore describes the character of a minister's wife, as well as of his own: and naturally concludes, that he who proclaims his want of piety and judgment in a case so plain and momentous, *tells* how unqualified he is for other matters—"For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?"

DECEMBER 29.

"*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*"
Job xiii. 15.

This is a noble resolution. It supposes suffering. Slaying, here, stands for every loss and infliction he could suffer or forebode. Slaying, literally means death: and Job does not exclude this from his supposition. He more than once seems to apprehend it as the consequence of his present malady—I know thou wilt bring me to death—My breath is corrupt—My days are extinct—The graves are ready for me. Indeed there is not much for him to slay—He has slain my cattle, my servants, my children; he has slain the tenderness of my wife, and the confidence of my friends; he has slain my health—and if there be any thing more, let him slay it—I can trust him down to the grave, and through it—for I know that my Redeemer liveth—and that in my flesh I shall see God—though my reins be consumed within me.

It professes confidence—"Though he slay me, yet will I *trust in him*." It is obvious, from hence, that he did not think God was really his enemy. If he had, how could he have trusted in him? He knew nothing of the language of a mystic—"Though I perish, I shall serve thee still—If thou send me to hell, I shall love thee there." These are the sayings of religious madness—and one hour of the suffering they make so light of would bring them to the use of their senses. By the very law of my nature it is impossible for me to regard a Being that I believe determined to make me miserable for ever; and God himself has commanded me to seek after my salvation and happiness—I could not, therefore, acquiesce in my misery without violating his will. Such a state of sublime self-annihilation, therefore, is not possible if

it were proper; and it is not proper if it were possible. But it is both proper and possible to believe that natural evil may be converted into moral good; that bodily pain may conduce to spiritual profit; that though no chastening for the present is joyous, but grievous, it may afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith; that behind a frowning providence he may hide a smiling face; that though he amputates a limb, it is to save life; and that, in ways beyond all my conceptions, he can, he will make all things work together for good to them that love him. And this is what Job means by his confidence.

But it also intimates difficulty—*Though* he slay me, *yet* will I trust in him. For there is much in searching and awful dispensations to try and check confidence: much to awaken suspicion and fear. When things are agreeable and prosperous, we feel comparatively little difficulty. But when the scene is changed; and the sky overspread; and the clouds return after the rain: when we are stripped, bereaved, abandoned: then we are cast out of his sight; our way is perished from the Lord; and we think our eye will no more see good! When troubles befall others, we go to them, and strengthen their hands in God. We readily deal out the promises to them, and feel inclined to reprove, if they refuse to be comforted. We tell them God is only waiting to be gracious; and will appear to their joy. But when we come into the same condition ourselves, we are unable to follow the advice we have given, and to receive the encouragements we have administered. Thus we incur the censure—"Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hand; thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees: but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled." Let us not be too severe with people in affliction. To trust God when we know not what he is doing; when he seems to oppose us; when he presents a sword even to our bosom, and we feel its point: it is then, verily, no easy thing to hope in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. But Job did this—Yea, says he, in the midst of every killing providence—though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Let us therefore seek after this confidence in God. For, first, there is nothing so honourable to God. Secondly; there is nothing so beneficial to ourselves. Thirdly; there is nothing so reasonable in itself—for whatever view we take of God; whether we consider his perfections; or his relations; or his promises; or his past dealings with others and ourselves: the more we shall be induced to say, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." So true is it—They that *know* his name, will put their trust in him.

DECEMBER 30.

"*Are not my days few?*"—Job. x. 20.

—Not years: months: weeks: but days. Life is to be reckoned by *days*. Are not my days *few?* They are so in every respect? relatively? comparatively? absolutely? It will not be necessary to prove this. No one denies it. No one can deny it. Yet how much depends upon the proper use of a truth so obvious, and a reflection so simple! Are not my days few?

—But how came they so? All men die, but not willingly. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life: but he cannot continue it. He hates, he dreads death. It is the king of terrors. The thought of it imbitters his comforts, and keeps him always subject to bondage. And could this have been the natural state of man as he came from the hands of his Maker? The Deist meets with this fact, as well as we: and as he cannot deny it, let him account for it under the empire and agency of a Being who is "omnipotent benevolence." Revelation gives us the only rational and convincing account—"The body is dead because of sin." "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death has passed upon all men, because all have sinned." It is not "a debt due to nature." It is the consequence of a judicial and penal infliction: "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." We are not struck with this, because we are accustomed to the result; and it gradually takes place. But could we have seen the deluge destroying the whole world at once, we should not have questioned the provocation of God by some mighty cause. But where is the difference, as to punitive justice, whether all the criminals are executed together, or led forth one by one? Are not my days few?

Do not then render them fewer. What! you are ready to exclaim, are we in danger of turning self-murderers? Yet how many are continually reported as having destroyed themselves! But violence is not the only mode of shortening life. One of our most eminent physicians has affirmed, that "the board destroys more than the sword." Another has said, "Though all men are mortal, not one in a thousand dies a purely natural death." Many enervate themselves by lying late in bed; and living, if it deserves the name of life, in lazy inactiveness, as injurious to health as to virtue. Envy is the rottenness of the bones. Fretfulness and anxiety corrode. Anger and malice consume. It is needless to mention intemperance and sensuality, the effects of which so often lie down with the sinner in an early grave. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is. By freeing us from the malignant passions, which are always injurious to ourselves, as well as

others; and by inducing the affectionate and benevolent ones, which are always beneficial: by the peace it sheds abroad in the bosom; and the hope and confidence it authorizes and inspires, as well as by surrounding us with the care of Providence: it is, as David calls it, "the health of the countenance;" and justifies the admonition of his son—"Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." Are not my days few?

—Why then moderate your attachment to every thing that depends upon their brevity. Who would set their heart on that which is not? Who would load with treasure a vessel rotten or full of holes? All the admired distinctions and possessions of the world are very uncertain in themselves, and often leave us: but if they continue with us, we cannot continue with them. We brought nothing with us into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Yet, stripped and naked as we shall go, go we must; and the time of our departure is at hand. Oh! what shall we think, a few days hence, of those pursuits which now so much engross us! "To-morrow we die;" and what will it signify, whether we are carried to the grave from a cottage, or a mansion; or leave behind us much or little? Endeavour to think always, as you will feel soon. "Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Are not my days few?

—Then let us well employ and improve them. This is what Moses prayed for: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And what is wisdom? This must be determined by circumstances. What is wise conduct in one man may be folly in another, because of their different relations and circumstances. But it is easy to determine what is wisdom in a man who numbers, his days and finds them to be few: and who has, during their continuance, an all-important interest to secure; and has no other opportunity. If he is guilty, it must be wise in him to seek forgiveness. If he is lost, it must be wise in him to seek salvation; and if he be unable to save himself, it must be wise in him to apply to another, who is appointed for the very purpose. And in our case, such an one there is His name is Jesus. He is mighty to save. He is willing to save. Instead of complaining of your application, he only complains of your neglect—Ye will not come to me that ye might have life. Many have tried his power and his love; and recommended him from their own happy experience. He is now on the throne of grace. But he will not be always there. He will soon ascend the tribunal of justice. Seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Behold, *now* is the accepted time. Behold, *now* is the day of salvation.

This part of our subject branches itself into another line of duty. As you are to *gain* good, so you are to *do* good—And this, too, is equally enforced by the fewness of your days. Life is yours; and it affords you one privilege above the saints in light. It is the opportunity of beneficence—of relieving the poor, of instructing the ignorant, of converting the sinner. But remember two things. *Their* days are few; and therefore they will soon be gone beyond the possibility of receiving relief. And *your* days are few; and you will soon be placed beyond the possibility of affording it. Wing your zeal, therefore, with the thought—"The night cometh wherein no man can work."

—There is a way of lengthening life. It is—not by duration, but by diligence. It is by "filling our days." It is by doing much business in a little time. Some live longer in a week than others do in a year.

DECEMBER 31.

"*He thanked God, and took courage.*"
Acts xxviii. 15.

Gratitude and confidence are individually excellent; but their union is admirable. They adorn, and recommend, and aid each other. There is no one they so well become as the Christian. And when is he without cause for both? When has he not, if truth examines his condition, a thousand excitements to praise, and encouragements to hope?

It can never be more proper to exercise these, than at the interesting period of the last day of the year; when we are so naturally and unavoidably led to think of the *past* and the *future*. Let us therefore follow the example of Paul, when he met the brethren at Appii Forum—Let us thank God and take courage.

What can be more reasonable than to thank God when we review the past! While many have been cut off, and not a few in their sins, we have been carried through another year in safety. We have been exposed to accidents and diseases, as well as they who are now in the dust; and our frame has been as delicate and as frail as their frame. But we are the living, the living to praise him, as it is this day; and all our bones can say, Who is a God like unto thee? While he has holden our souls in life, he has also continued our mercies. These mercies have been new every morning. Of the least of all these we have been unworthy. And had we been dealt with according to our desert, we should

have been the most wretched beings on earth. But we have been fed at his table: we have been clothed from his wardrobe. We have had not only the necessaries, but the comforts and indulgences of life. He has given us richly all things to enjoy. He has made the outgoings of our mornings and evenings to rejoice. He has given us the succession of the seasons. He has blessed the springing of the earth. He has charmed us in the field, and in the garden, with melody, and fragrance, and colours, and tastes. What relative attachments! What endearments of friendship! What pleasing interchanges of solitude and society! of labour and of rest, have we enjoyed!—We have not only to acknowledge private, but public mercies. How has he preserved and blessed our country, notwithstanding all our national provocations! He has not only blessed us personally, but relatively. He has been the Benefactor of our families, and our friends. Yea, he has blessed us not only in the kindnesses of his providence, but in the means of grace. We have had our Sabbaths. Our eyes have seen our teachers. We have been made joyful in his house of prayer. He has fed us with the finest of the wheat, and with oil out of the rock has he satisfied us. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!

We have had trials; but even these, instead of checking gratitude, if properly reviewed, will increase it. They have been few, compared with our comforts. They have been light, compared with the sufferings of others. They have been variously alleviated; in measure, when they shot forth, he debated with them; he stayed his rough wind in the day of the east wind. They have all been founded in a regard to our welfare. They have imbittered sin; and endeared the Scriptures, and the Throne of Grace, and the sympathy of Him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. They have weaned us from the world. They have told us that this is not our rest. They have also assured us that he knows how to support and to deliver. Aaron's rod blossomed—so shall ours; and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. There was honey at the end of Jonathan's rod—and there is sweetness at the end of ours. Yea, already we can say, It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Surely a gratitude is required, on this occasion, that will not expire in mere acknowledgments; but induce me to dedicate myself to his service, and walk before him in newness of life.

And what can be more reasonable than to take courage when we look forward? We enter, indeed, on the year commencing, not knowing what a day may bring forth: and darkness is apt to gender dread. Duties *will* arise; and we must meet their claims. Afflictions *may* arise; indeed they are almost unavoidable. Does not every path of life lead through a vale of tears? Is not every thing here uncertain? My health may be assailed. My friends may be removed. This year I may die.

—But I will pore on this no longer. I will not sour my present mercies, by suspicion, or fear, or anxiety. It is my duty, it is my privilege, to be careful for nothing; but to cast all my care on him who careth for me.—I take courage, from his former dispensations. Has he ever forsaken or forgotten me? Because he has been my help, therefore under the shadow of his wings will I rejoice.—I take courage, from his providence. I am not in "a fatherless world." Nothing is left to chance. My ways are continually before him; and the very hairs of my head are all numbered.—I take courage, from his power. Nothing is too hard for him. He can make even mine enemies to be at peace with me. He can render every loss a gain. He can make all things work together for my good.—I take courage, from his promises. They are all faithfulness and truth. And what case do they leave unnoticed, unprovided for, from which despondency can spring? I will therefore trust, and not be afraid, but go forward, cheerfully with Him who said—I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

"Beneath his smiles my heart has liv'd,
And part of heaven possess'd:
I praise his Name for grace receiv'd,
And trust him for the rest."

END OF MORNING EXERCISES.

EVENING EXERCISES.

EVENING EXERCISES

FOR

EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

"Never be without a book in daily reading, of a direct Scriptural and devotional tendency."—HALE

"The testimonies of thy grace,
I set before mine eyes;
Thence I derive my daily strength,
And *there* my comfort lies.
Thy word is everlasting truth;
How pure is every page!
That Holy Book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age."—WATTS.

"Not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure, and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom. What is more is fume,
Emptiness, or fond impertinence;
And renders us, in things that most concern,
Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek."—MILTON.

"The prophet who hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord."—JEREMIAH

TO

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Esq.

My dear Sir,

I am not certain that my motive was quite pure, when I felt a very powerful desire that, in a way of some little publicity and continuance, I might appear associated with One so esteemed and illustrious as the Man whose name dignifies this page, and at whose feet I presume to lay these Volumes.

A writer of judgment and wit has somewhere said, that "there are good persons with whom it will be soon enough to be acquainted in heaven." But there are individuals with whom it is no common privilege to have been acquainted on earth.

It is now more than forty years since the Writer of this Address was indulged and honoured with your notice and friendship. During this period (so long in the brevity of human life!) he has had many opportunities of deriving great pleasure and profit from your private conversation; and also of observing in your public career, the proofs you displayed of the Orator, the Statesman, the Advocate of enlightened Freedom, and a feeling, fearless, persevering, and successful opponent of a traffic "that is a reproach to any people." But he would be unworthy of the ministry he fills, and be ashamed of the age he has now reached, as a professed follower of your Lord and Saviour, if he could not increasingly say, with Young,

"A Christian is the highest style of man."

All other greatness is, in the view of faith, seducing and dangerous; in actual enjoyment, unsatisfactory and vain; and in duration, fleeting and momentary. "The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The expectation of the man who has his "portion in this life" is continually deteriorating; for every hour brings him nearer the loss of all his treasure; and "as he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand." But the "good hope through grace," which animates the believer, is always approaching its realities; and therefore grows, with the lapse of time, more valuable and more lively. As it is spiritual in its quality, and heavenly in its object, it does not depend on outward things, and is not affected with the decay of nature. Like the Glastonbury thorn, fabulously planted by Joseph of Arimathæa, it blooms in the depth of winter. It "brings forth fruit in old age." "At evening-tide it is light"—"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

And this, my dear Sir, you are now happily experiencing at the close of more than "threescore years and ten." And I hail you, not as descending towards the grave under the applause of nations, but as an heir of immortality, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Attended with the thanksgivings of the truly wise and good on your behalf, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and with an unsullied religious reputation, you are finishing a course, which you have been enabled to pursue through evil report and through good report; undeviatingly, unabatingly; forgetful of none of the claims of personal or relative godliness, amidst all the cares and engagements of a popularity peculiarly varied and extensive; neglecting, in addition to the influence of exam-

ple, no means to recommend the one thing needful to others ; and even from the Press, defending the interests of practical Christianity, in a work so widely circulated, so justly admired, and so pre-eminently useful, especially among the higher classes in society.

Nor can I omit the opportunity of acknowledging individually, the obligations I feel myself under to your zeal and wisdom, when, in the novitiate of my Ministry, your correspondence furnished me with hints of admonition, instruction, and encouragement, to which I owe much of any degree of acceptance and usefulness with which I have been favoured. Nor can I forbear also to mention another Benefactor, whose name I know is as dear to every feeling of your heart as it is to every feeling of my own—the Rev. John Newton. With this incomparable man I was brought into an early intimacy, in consequence of his addressing me without solicitation, and when personally unknown to him, in counsels and advice the most seasonable, just as I had emerged into public life, peculiarly young, and inexperienced, and exposed. These opportune advantages, for which I would be daily thankful, recall the exclamation of Solomon, " A word fitly spoken how good is it !" and lead me to lament that persons so seldom in this way, seek or even seize opportunities of usefulness. How often do they omit to avail themselves of the influence which God, by their rank, or wisdom, or piety, or age, has given them over others, for their good; though it is a talent for which they are responsible ; and the use of which would often be as welcome in the exertion as important in the results.

The years which have passed over our acquaintance have been no ordinary ones. They have been signalized by some of the most important events that could effect other nations or our own. I am sufficiently aware of your sentiments, and fully accord with them in thinking, that while, as men and citizens, we cannot be indifferent to the state of public affairs, but ought to be alive to the welfare of a country that has such unexampled claims to our attachment and gratitude ; yet that, as Christians, we should judge of things by a rule of our own ; and esteem those the best days in which the best Cause flourishes most. Now while we have suffered much, and have had much to deplore, yet " the walls of the temple " have been rising " in troublous times," and our political gloom has been relieved by more than gleams of religious glory. Let us not ask with some, " What is the cause that the former days were better than these ?" The fact itself is, at least as to spiritual things, certainly inadmissible. Conceding that eighty or ninety years ago we had fewer taxes, and many of the articles of life were more cheaply purchasable, how much more than counterbalanced was this, by an unconverted ministry, a people perishing for lack of knowledge, a general carelessness with regard to the soul, and an entire unconcern for the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom !

At our first interview we could refer to none of the many glorious Institutions which are now established. I have not space to enumerate them, nor must I yield myself to enlarge on their claims. But reluctantly to pass by others, one of these has been surpassed by nothing since the days of the Apostles ; and when I refer to the importance of its design, the simplicity and wisdom of its constitution, the rapidity of its growth, the vastness of its success, the number of languages into which it has translated the Scriptures, and the immensity of copies which it has distributed, I need not say, I mean the British and Foreign Bible Society, which may God preserve uninjured, and continue to smile upon, till all shall possess the unsearchable riches of Christ ! Since then, too, what an extension has there been of Evangelical doctrine in the Establishment and among the Dissenters ; and, I fearlessly add, of the genuine influences of Divine grace in the hearts and lives of thousands—Surely no unprejudiced individual can trace these things, comparatively with what preceded them, and not exclaim, " God hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

I rejoice, my dear Sir, that a person of your consideration is in the healthful number of those who, notwithstanding the contemptuous denial of some, and the

gloomy forebodings of others, believe that real religion *has* been advancing, and *is* spreading, and *will* continue to spread, till, without any disruption of the present system, "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." *You* do not expect that a country called by his name, and in which he has such a growing multitude of followers, will be given up of God; and the fountain from which so many streams of health and life are issuing to bless the world, will be destroyed. You justly think, that the way to gain more is not despise or disown what the Spirit of God has graciously done for us already: and that the way to improvement is not to run down and condemn every present scheme, attainment, and exertion, because they are not free from those failings which some are too studious to discover, too delighted to expose, and too zealous to enlarge and magnify. If we are not to be weary in well-doing, we need not only exhortation, but hope, which is at once the most active, as well as the most cheerful principle. Nothing so unnerves energy and slackens diligence as despondency. Nothing is equally contagious with fear. Those who feel alarm always love to transfuse it. Awful intimations of approaching evils are not only congenial to the melancholic, but the dissatisfied; and while they distress the timid, they charm those who are given to change. It is also easy to perceive that when men have committed themselves in woful announcements, they immediately feel a kind of prophetical credit at stake, and are under considerable temptation to welcome disasters as prognostics: for though they may professedly pray against the judgments, they know, and this is a great drawback to their fervency, that their avowed creed requires the calamities as vouchers of the wisdom and truth of their interpretations. If, to preserve his reputation from suspicion, after he had cried, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed, Jonah himself was sad and sullen, and thought he did well to be angry even unto death, because the city, with all the men, women, children, and cattle, was not demolished, according to his word! What may not be feared from human nature now, if exercised with similar *disappointments?*

As, owing to the mildness and justice of the laws of the paternal government under which we are privileged to live, there is now no outward persecution; and yet, as religion always requires to be tried, we must expect that "from among ourselves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them:" for "there must be heresies, that they which are of a contrary part may be made manifest." In such cases many are "tossed about by every wind of doctrine" till they make "shipwreck of faith and a good conscience." Others, who are not destroyed, suffer loss, especially in the simple, affectionate, devotional frame of their spirit. If *good* men are injured, they are commonly beguiled: *they* are drawn aside by something piously specious. Any proposal, directly erroneous or sinful, would excite their alarm as well as aversion. But if the enemy comes transformed into an angel of light, they think they ought not only to receive, but welcome a heavenly visitant: if he enters with the Bible only in his hand, and claims to fix their regards to any thing on that holy ground, they feel themselves not only safe, but even following the will of God:—not considering that if, even in the Scriptures, the speculative entices us away from the practical, and the mysterious from the plain; and something though true and good in itself, but subordinate, engrosses the time and attention which should be supremely absorbed by repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ—his aim may be answered, and "Satan get an advantage over us." Such persons acting conscientiously, become as determined as martyrs; and continually musing upon one chosen topic, they grow as passionate as lovers, and wonder that all others are not likeminded with them.

"The worst of madmen is a saint run mad."

There is not only a pride in dress, and beauty, and riches, and rank, and talent; but of opinion also: a kind of mental vanity, that seeks distinction by peculiarity;

and would draw notice by separateness: as that which stands alone is more observ able, especially when noise is added to position. In this case the female is easily betrayed beyond some of the decorums of her sex; the younger will not submit to the elder; the hearer sits in judgment on the preacher; and he that is wise in his own conceit will be wiser than seven men that can render a reason. For

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Mushrooms, and less saleable funguses, are ordinarily found in a certain kind of rich and rank soil. When religion, from being neglected, becomes all at once the subject of general attention, many will not only be impressed, but surprised and perplexed. The light, good in itself, may for the time be too strong for the weakness of the eye, and the suddenness of the glare may dazzle rather than enlighten. It is very possible for the Church, when roused from a state of lethargy, to be in danger from the opposite extreme. The frost of formality may be followed by the fever of enthusiasm. Whenever, indeed, there is a high degree of religious excitement, it cannot be wonderful, considering human ignorance, prejudice, and depravity, that there should be some visionary and strange ebullitions. We have witnessed some of these during the years that are past; but the day in which we now are is singular for the revival (with some perhaps perfectly new pretensions) of most of the notions that were fermented into being at the time of the Commonwealth, and which were then opposed by Owen, Baxter, and others, who had more divinity in their little finger than is to be found in the body, soul, and spirit, of many of the modern innovaters and improvers, who imagine that *their* light is not only "the light of the sun, but the light of seven days!"

A review of History will show us that, at the return of less than half a century, some have commonly risen up eager and able to determine the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put into his own power, and which the *Apostles* were told it was not for *them* to know. And the same confidence has always been attended with the same success. No gain has ever followed the efforts worthy the time and attention expended upon them; no addition has ever been made to the understanding of the Scriptures; no fresh data have been established from which preachers could safely argue; no practical utility has been afforded to Christians in their private walk with God. And as their documents were not capable of demonstration; as for want of certainty they could not become principles of conduct; and as no great impression can be long maintained on the public mind that is not based on obvious truth; the noise of the warfare after a while has always died away, and left us with the conviction that "there is no prophet among us; nor any that telleth how long."

Some prove, in their spiritual genealogy, a descent from Reuben, of whom the dying father said, "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Yet they may strike, and produce a *temporary* impression in their favour, especially in a country like this; a country proverbial for its credulity, and its more than Athenian rage for something new, whatever be the *nature* of it. In England—

("England, with all thy faults I love thee still—
——————— and I can feel
Thy follies too")—

in England, it has been said by a satirical yet just observer, that "any monster will make a man:" that is, be the means of rendering him renowned or rich. Who can question this for a moment, that has patience to mortify himself as a Briton by reflection and review? Take prodigies. Dwarfs, giants, unnatural births, deformities—the more hideous, the more repelling the spectacles, the more attractive and popular have they always been. Take empiricisms. Their name is Legion; from animal magnetism and the metallic tractors, down to the last infallible remedy for general or specific complaints; all attested and recommended by the most unexceptionable authorities, especially in high life! Take the feats which have been announced for exhibition. Whatever the promiser has engaged

to perform, whether to walk upon the water, or draw himself into a bottle, what large crowds have been drawn together at the time appointed, and with no few of the better sort of people always among them! How has learning been trifled with and degraded! Two or three insulated facts, and a few doubtful or convertible appearances, have been wrought up into a SCIENCE; and some very clever men have advocated its claims to zealous belief, and contrived to puzzle the opponents they could not convince. In the article of Preaching, what manœuvres of popularity have not been successfully tried, till there seems hardly any thing left for an experimenter—unless to vociferate with his heels in the air—This would certainly produce greater congregations than any which have been witnessed—and who could deny that there would be something in the case *preter*-natural?

But what exemplifications, had we leisure to pursue them, should we find in the article of religious absurdity and extravagance! Has any thing been ever broached with confidence that has not gained considerable attention? Did not the effusions of a Brothers, who died where only he should have lived, in confinement for madness, secure numerous believers and admirers? Had he not defenders from the Press? Did he not obtain the notice of a very learned Senator in the House of Commons? And as to the Exeter prophetess, without any one quality to recommend her but ignorance, impudence, and blasphemy; yet did she not make a multitude of converts, not only among the canaille, but among persons of some distinction? and had she not followers and defenders even among the Clergy themselves?—Not to observe that when she reported that she should soon be the mother of the infant Messiah, a medical practitioner of some eminence, and the author of a useful work for families, came forward and staked his credit on her being enceinte!

All reasoning and all ridicule for the time only served to contribute to the force and obstinacy of the folly. But how just, here, is the remark of an eminent female writer—"Such preposterous pretensions being obviously out of the power of human nature to accomplish, the very extravagance is believed to be super natural. It is the impossibility which makes the assumed certainty; as the epilepsy of Mahomet confirmed his claims to inspiration." And is there nothing now going forward far exceeding in credulous wonder, arrogant pretension, and miraculous boasting, all that has gone before it, in a country which, in a twofold sense, may well be called "a land of vision?"*

One way to become sceptical is, instead of remembering our Lord's words, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them," to become critical and curious in religion. A very fruitful source of error is to trample on the distinction of Moses; "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." The sciences and the arts being human inventions, and therefore not only finite, but imperfect, will allow of new discoveries; and every innovation is commonly an improvement, or by experiment it is soon rejected: but we make no scruple to say, that novelty in religion is needless, dangerous, delusive. We are to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. The design of the Gospel is to "cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The maxim often quoted, of a very great and a very good man, who blesses and adorns our own age, and who furnishes another proof that first-rate minds are simple and free from eccentricities—"Though we are not to be wise above what is written, we should be wise up to what is written;" has been made to justify more than he intended. The Apostle considers it a reproach to be "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth:" and it is a matter

* If a person wishes to see this subject fully treated, he would do well to read a late publication, called "Modern Fanaticism Unveiled." The work is anonymous, but the Author not only writes with great ability and spirit, but is a determined advocate for Evangelical religion, and says nothing, (which is always to be dreaded in such discussions,) to the disparagement of *serious* or *fervent* piety

of lamentation when persons, perhaps well disposed, are seized with the imagination that there is something of importance to be yet found out in religion, instead of walking in the light, and having the heart established with grace. And what is the subject of these possible or desirable developements? And what lack of motive or of consolation did *they* feel, who have gone before us in every kind of excellency? And what more perfect characters can we expect than the Leightons and Howes, who, it now seems, were denied illuminations conferred on individuals just entering into the kingdom of God, without a religious education, and from the midst of worldly dissipation or indifference? And where are the superior effects of discoveries, which we are assured not only possess truth, but are of the greatest efficiency? We need not be afraid to compare the converts, the benefactors, the sufferers, the martyrs of one school with those of another. "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new, for he saith, the old is better."

Here again it is refreshing and delightful, to turn to One distinguished by consistency, and who has awakened and retained attention so long, not by strangeness but excellence; not by crying, Lo, here; or lo, there! but by walking steadfastly in the truth; and whose path has not been the glare of the meteor, or the "lawless sweep of the comet," but the shining light of the sun, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Nothing would be more satisfactory to the Dedicator, now in the evening of life, than to be able to think, that in this particular he had been in some measure the follower of his admired and honoured Friend. And by the grace of God he can say, that it has been his *aim* and *prayer* to move straight on, never turning aside to the right hand or to the left, to avail himself of any temporary and adventitious aids of popular applause; constantly engaged in pressing only the plain and essential principles of the Gospel, and in matters of inferior importance, if not of disputable truth, having faith, to have it to himself before God.

There has been perhaps some little shade of difference in our doctrinal views; but as it has not been sufficient to impair your approbation of my preaching and writings, so I am persuaded you will find nothing in these volumes, should you ever look into them, to offend, even if an occasional reflection does not *perfectly* suit your own convictions. In one thing it is certain we differ. We are not unwilling respectively to own the Episcopalian and the Dissenter. But in this distinction, we feel conviction without censure, and avow preference without exclusion. And has Providence no concern in such results as these? Suppose, my dear Sir, you had been placed originally in my circumstances, and I had been placed in yours? Is it impossible or improbable that each of us might have been differently minded from what we now are? Yet who determines the bounds of our habitations? Who administers the events of our birth, and of the days of our earlier and most durable impressions? Who arranges the contacts into which we are brought with religious connexions and spiritual instructers? And does not bigotry, that quarrels with every thing else, arraign the agency of the Most High, and indirectly at least censure him? We do not use this argument without qualification, or push it to every extent; but there are evidently some who not only "judge another man's servant," but another man's master.

We may in a degree value ourselves as being members of a particular church, but we shall be saved only as members of the church universal: and if we are in a right spirit, we shall prize the name of a Christian a thousand times more than any other name, however extensive or esteemed the religious body from which it is derived.

Uniformity of sentiment may be viewed much in the same way with equality of property. In each case the thing itself is perfectly impracticable; and if it could be attained it would be injurious, rather than useful. It would abrogate many divine injunctions, contract the sphere of relative virtue, and exclude various duties which go far into the amiableness and perfection of Christian character. No; it is better to have the protection of the sovereign, and the obedience of the

subject; the wages of the master, and the labour of the servant; the condescension of the rich, and the respect of the poor; the charity of the benefactor, and the gratitude of the receiver. "If all were the seeing where were the hearing?" The hands and the feet could not dispense with each other, or even exchange their place and office. If persons acted from hypocrisy, formality, and education only, they might present a kind of sameness; but if they think for themselves, as they are not only allowed, but required to do, it is easy to see, that with the differences there are in the structure of mind, and in outward opportunities and advantages, they cannot fall precisely into the same views. But let them exercise forbearance and candour, let them emulate each other, let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please themselves;—and we shall have a sum of moral excellence, far superior to what could be derived from a dull, still, stagnant conformity of opinions. And is it not for this state of things, among those "that hold the head, even Christ," that the Apostle provides? "Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind." "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The quotation is long, but I fear the principles of the reasoning and the enforcements are not as yet duly regarded by any religious party, though there are, in our respective communities, individuals who walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing. And I cannot forbear adding a few more of those fine Texts, which do not exclude the *number*, but diminish the *importance* of the articles of difference, and press only those in which Christians agree. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Let us abide in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. He has set our feet in a large place. There is room enough in the plain around Stonehenge, for persons to walk and commune together very commodiously—Why should they try to get on some old molehills, or barrows over the dead, or hedge banks, where they must press against each other, or jostle each other down?

A cordial agreement in the essentials of the Gospel *should* induce us to put up with minor differences; and a superior and constant engagement of the soul to the most important objects of religion *will* draw off, *comparatively*, the attention from inferior ones, leaving us neither leisure or relish for them.

When therefore, in reference to the latter day glory, it is said, "they shall see eye to eye," we are persuaded, with Baxter, that there may not be a much more complete uniformity of opinion in many things than there now is. But there will be a more perfect accordance *in* great things, and a more perfect agreement *concerning* lesser ones. They will see eye to eye as to the propriety of one

measure;—That if we cannot be of one mind, we should, like the first converts at Jerusalem, be "of one heart and of one soul."

"But does not the Scripture speak much of unity among Christians?" It does—And what that oneness is may be inferred from fact as well as from reasoning. The Saviour prayed that "all" his followers might be "one:" and God had before promised that he would give his people "one heart and one way." Now it can hardly be supposed that this prayer and this promise have not been accomplished. But if they *have* been fulfilled, it has not been in a sameness of sentiment with regard to a number of things pertaining to religion, but with regard to the substance of religion itself:—a oneness unaffected by minuter distinctions; a oneness, which included as servants of the same Lord, and as guests at the same table, a Hopkins and a Bates, a Watts and a Newton, a Porteus and a Hall: a oneness that resembles the identity of human nature, notwithstanding all the varieties of man.

When will some persons believe or remember, That where there are no parts there can be no union? That where there is no variety there can be no harmony? That it does not follow because one thing is right that another is absolutely wrong? That others differ no further from us than we differ from others? That it is meanness and injustice to assume a freedom we refuse to yield? That children, differing in age, and size, and dress, and schooling, and designation belong to the same family? And that the grain growing in various fields and distances is wheat still, sown by the same hand, and to be gathered into the same garner?

And would it not be well for us often to reflect on the state of things in another world, where it is believed by all, that the differences which now too often keep the true disciples of Christ at a distance from each other, will be done away? And to ask ourselves whether we are not likely to be the more complete, the more we resemble the spirits of just men made perfect? And whether we *must* not have a meetness for glory before we *can* enjoy it?—But what preparation in kind, what in degree, for such a communion above, have they who feel only aversion to all those who, however holy and heavenly, walk not with them in the outward order of religious administrations? How special and circumscribed is what some mean by the communion of saints. It only respects those within their own enclosures. They would inhibit their members from having much intercourse in company, and from all, even occasional intermixture in religious exercises, with those they hope to mingle with for ever. But not to observe that such intercourse and intermixture are perfectly consistent with general and avowed regularity of preference and practice; and the good influence it has to remove the haughty and offensive repulsion of exclusiveness;—Is there (as "we are taught of God to love one another:" and as "every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him,") is there no danger of putting a force upon pious tendencies, and of chilling the warmth of holy emotions by the coldness and abstraction of system and rules? The remark of Paley on another subject may be well applied here. He is arguing the propriety of refusing every application of common beggars for relief. Some, he observes, have recommended the practice by strong reasonings, and he himself seems much inclined to the same side. But he is too frank not to ask, "Yet, after all, is it not to be feared, lest such invariable refusing should suffocate benevolent feeling?"

You, my dear Sir, are a proof that Christian liberality may abound, without laxity and without inconsistency. And other instances of the same lovely character are increasingly coming forward; in which we see how rigid contention for minor partialities can yield to the force of Christian charity, and disappear before the grandeur of "the common salvation," and the grace of "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all." "Perhaps," says Robert Hall, "there never was so much unanimity witnessed among the professors of serious piety as at the present. Systems of religion fundamentally erroneous are falling into decay, while the subordinate points of difference, which do not affect the principal verities of Christianity, nor the ground of hope, are

either consigned to oblivion, or are the subjects of temperate and amicable controversy; and in consequence of their subsiding to their just level, the former appear in their great and natural magnitude. And if the religion of Christ ever assumes her ancient lustre, and we are assured by the highest authority she will, it must be by retracing our steps, by reverting to the original principles on which, as a social institution, it was founded; we must go back to the simplicity of the first ages; we must learn to quit a subtle and disputatious Theology, for a religion of love, emanating from a few divinely energetic principles, which pervade every page of inspiration, and demand nothing for their adoption and belief besides a humble and contrite heart."

Bunyan, in his Holy War, says, that Mr. Prejudice fell down and broke his leg: "I wish," adds the honest and (Mr. Southey himself does not refuse him the attribute) the matchless Allegorist—"he had broken his neck." Cordially joining in this devout wish, and apologizing for the undesigned length and freedom of this desultory Address, allow me, with every sentiment of regard and esteem to subscribe myself,

My dear Sir,

Your much obliged and humble

Friend and Servant

WM. JAY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

This Advertisement is not in the nature of an apology. If the work be good, it needs none; if bad, it deserves none. But it is to intimate the reasons of the author's engaging so soon again in a similar publication with the former. They were, the peculiar acceptance "The Morning Exercises for the Closet" have met with; the many testimonies of their usefulness he has received; and the various applications addressed to him by Christians and ministers, exciting him to send forth a companion to them for the evening. He is fully aware that "the importunity of friends," so frequently urged by writers for their appearing before the public, is a justification perhaps never sufficient, and not always *very* true; yet it is certain that, but for this provocative, the following reflections had never seen the light.

The author hopes, however, that this second series of three hundred and sixty-five Exercises to aid the retired Christian "at evening-tide to meditate," will be no less approved and useful than the preceding number He has not paid less attention in the selection and execution of the subjects; but that attention has been paid amidst the numerous engagements of an extensive charge, and through the greatest period of the work also, under the anguish and anxieties of the most trying domestic affliction. He has no doubt but, in seven hundred and thirty Exercises of this kind, the same thought and illustration sometimes, and perhaps nearly in the same words, may occur. But they occur in new positions and connexions; and the prevention was almost impossible. Many of his readers will perceive marks of that haste which was also inevitable; and they who are accustomed to composition themselves, will know how hard it is to write on any interesting and fertile topic, under the restraints of a great and prescribed brevity; and how unfriendly to ornament is perpetual effort at condensation. "If I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto."

Percy Place, Bath, Dec. 10th, 1831.

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2. Christ's Preaching... .....Luke iv. 21, 22.
3. Divine Sustentation.....Heb. i. 3.
4. The unkindly Friend.....2 Sam. xvi. 17.
5. Herod's Persecution.....Acts xii. 1—3.
6. The Christian Race.....Heb. xii. 1, 2.
7. Manasseh's Prayer... .....2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.
8. Pre-eminent Advantages.....Matt. xiii. 17.
9. The Hard Heart.....Ezek. iii. 7.
10. Divine Tuition..... . ..Isaiah liv. 13.
11. Mortality .....Job xiv. 10.
12. Christ's Plenitude..... .....John i. 14.
13. The Church praying for Peter..Acts xii. 5.
14. The Wonderful Deliverance....Acts xii. 6, 7.
15. The Glorious Rest..... . . ...Isaiah xi. 10.
16 The Right Hand..... ..Matt. xxv. 34.
17. Christian Salutations.....Philemon 23—25.
18. A sanctifying God.....Micah vii. 19.
19. The Ark received by Obed-edom.2 Sam. vi. 10.
20. The Banished not Expelled.....2 Sam. xiv. 14.
21 Whose I am..... .....Acts xxvii. 23.
22. The Seasonable Messenger.... Acts xxvii. 23.
23. The Cheering Assurance..... Acts xxvii. 24—26.
24. Unbelief bewailed..... .....Mark ix. 24.
25 The Work of God.... .....Micah vii. 14.
26. The Expiation.....Heb. i. 3.
27. Following with Fear.....Mark x. 32.
28. The Heavenly Rest.....2 Thess. i. 6, 7.
29. Divine Blessing... .. ..1 Chron. xxvi. 5.
30. Obed-edom's Fame..... 2 Sam. vi. 12.
31. An Illumination.....John ix. 30.

NOVEMBER.

1. The Reality of Conversion....2 Chron xxxiii. 13.
2. The Perfect Likeness.... .....Psalm xvii 15.
3 The Influence of Prayer.....Philemon 22.
4. The Willing Victim..... John xvii. 19.
5. The Sanctified Believer... ....John xvii. 19.
6. The Eternity of God. . .....Gen. xxi. 33.
7. The Burdened Soul.....2 Cor. v. 4.
8. Divine Security and Support...Deut. xxxiii. 27.
9. The Good Shepherd... . .....Luke xv. 5.
10. The Endearer of Christ.. . ...1 Pet. ii. 7.
11. Christ Precious..... . . 1 Pet. ii. 7.
12. The Perplexed and Inquiring Christian.....Job xxiii. 8, 9.
13. The Burden removed... .....Psalm lv. 22.
14. Vital Participation of Christ...John vi. 53.
15. The Heroism of Faith .....John xi. 15.
16. The Sufferer the Succourer....Heb. ii. 18.
17. Confession of Christ.....Matt. x. 32.
18. Divine Applause..... .....Matt. x. 32.
19. Future Glory.....1 Pet. v. 1.
20. The Final Exclusion..... ...Matt. xxv. 41.
21. The Devout Traveller..... ..Ruth i. 21.
22. The Gospel Feast.....Matt. xxii. 4.
23. The Practical Christian.....John iii. 21.
24. The Trial of Uprightness.....John iii. 21.
25 Divine Influence proved.....John iii. 21.
26. Full Satisfaction.....Psalm xvii. 15.
27. Conscious Relief.....Job xxiii. 10.
28. The Twofold Benediction... ..Ephes. i. 3.
29. Christian Partnership.....Philemon 17.
30. The Birth of Noah.....Gen. v. 29.

DECEMBER.

1. The Saviour's Glory. .....John i. 14.
2. Tabernacle Services..... Numb. vii. 1—9.
3. The Experience of Christ.....Heb. v. 8.
4. The Precious Trial... .....Job xxiii. 10.
5. Jeremiah in the Dungeon.....Jer. xxxviii. 6.
6. The Kind Ethiopian.....Jer. xxxviii. 11—13.
7. Kindness Rewarded.....Jer. xxxviii. 15—18.
8. The Simple Acknowledgment..John ix. 25.
9. The Sufferings of Christ.....Isaiah liii. 11.
10. The Effects of Christ's Death...Isaiah liii. 11.
11. The Saviour's Satisfaction.....Isaiah liii. 11.
12. Man's Ignorance and Inability.Jer. x. 23.
13. The Offering of the Princes....Numb. vii. 10.
14. The Author of Salvation.....Heb. v. 9.
15. The Minstrel.....2 Kings iii. 15.
16. Nothing too hard for the Lord ..Jer. xxxii. 17.
17. Paul Preserved..... .Acts ix 23—25.
18. The New Disciple..... ..Acts ix 26, 27.
19. Divine Condescension.....2 Chron. vi. 18.
20. The Caution.....1 Kings xx. 11.
21. Acceptable Prayer.....1 Tim. ii. 8.
22. Safety in Danger.....2 Kings vi. 15—17.
23. The Mediator.....Jer. xxx. 21.
24. The Love of Jesus.....Ephes. v. 2.
25. The Saviour's Birth. .....Micah v. 2.
26. The Character of Christ.....Luke ii. 25.
27. The Improvement of the Blessing. .....Luke ii. 25.
28. The Elder Brother..... .....Heb. ii. 17.
29. The Presentation of Jacob....Gen. xlvii. 7.
30. The Question of Pharaoh..... Gen. xlvii. 8.
31. The Representation of Life...Gen. xlvii 9.

EVENING EXERCISES

FOR

THE CLOSET.

JANUARY 1.

"*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.*"—Acts xx. 22, 23.

PAUL here speaks of himself as an Apostle. But the facts he expresses with regard to his official destination, will apply to our experience as men, and as Christians. And we may derive from them a reflection peculiarly seasonable, at the commencement of another annual period of our time—With regard to the future, he was both ignorant and informed; unacquainted with some things, but well apprized of others.

Though Paul sometimes prophesied, he could not command the attribute of foreknowledge when he pleased. The use of it was always a miracle, and limited to a particular subject. He was therefore left uninformed of the ordinary course of life; and had to learn the will of God by events. Hence he says to the Philippians, "I hope presently to send Timothy, as soon as I see how it will go with me." It is the same with us; and as he was now going up to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that would befall him there, so are we entering into another year, not knowing what a day may bring forth. But is this to be lamented? "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." The concealment is wise, and kind. We may judge of this by our past feelings. Had we been previously informed of the scenes through which we have passed, our hearts would have failed at the thought: yet when the dispensations came, we were able to bear them, and had been really though unconsciously prepared for them. And suppose we were now informed of some of the changes we may be called to endure in the months before us, we should be seized perhaps with an overpowering surprise and oppression, rendering us dead to all present enjoyments, and incapable of every present engagement. He therefore says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Let us trust in Him. He claims the full confidence of the heart, not only by his goodness but by his wisdom. Although we go out not knowing whither we go, He knoweth the way that we take. Nothing can deceive or perplex our guide. Especially let us check the workings of a vain curiosity. To this we are naturally prone. All pant to draw back the veil, and peep into futurity. But none are intrusted with its secrets. Even our Lord's own disciples were rebuked for wishing to know the times and the seasons which the Father reserved in his own power. This advice will be found to be not only our duty but our privilege—our "strength" here "is to sit still.' We may consider the year before us, as a desk containing three hundred and sixty-five letters, addressed to us, one for every day, announcing its trials, and prescribing its employments—with an order to open daily no letter but the letter for the day. Now we may be strongly tempted to unseal beforehand some of the remainder; but this would only serve to embarrass us, while we should violate thereby the rule our Owner and Master has laid down for us—"Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

But Paul's ignorance was not entire. Though he knew not *what* in particular would befall him at *Jerusalem*, yet the Holy Ghost testified that in every place bonds and afflictions awaited him: so that he was sure of one thing—sure of being always a sufferer, for the sake of the Lord Jesus. And thus it is with us. Though the future is not laid

open to our view, yet it is not concealed from us in every respect and degree. Though we know not what is to come in the detail, we can apprehend much of it in the mass. Indeed without some reliance on the general course of things, we could not properly carry on the system of life. Many of our present duties derive their existence and importance from some future relations. Instinct, in the brute creation, teaches them to look forward: and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; and the ant provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in harvest. And is reason given us in vain? Or is there nothing for it to operate upon beyond the present hour? "The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself," says the Scripture. And the same authority adds, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

With regard then to the future, in every period, relation, and condition of life, some things may be reckoned upon. Thus, in the natural world, we know that the seasons will come round in their time and place with little variation. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

We also know that the general state and usages of society will be what they ever have been. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us."

We are sure no creature-possessions and enjoyments will fully meet our hopes and wishes. They never have produced satisfaction. They were never designed to do it—They are incapable of doing it.

We may certainly expect that trials of one kind or another will be our lot. They grow out of our very state and nature. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."

We must be infatuated if we are not aware that all our connexions here are precarious. Some may abandon us from insincerity; some may leave us from infirmity: some may be removed to a distance by events: some may be laid in the grave. Need we be informed that the desire of our eyes is mortal? That childhood and youth are vanity?

Can we be ignorant that with growing years we are to look for growing privations and weaknesses? That our senses will decay, that desire will fail, that the grasshopper will be a burden? It is the tax of age. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

For the living know that they shall die. It is the way of all the earth: and whatever may be doubtful when we look onward, there is not a human being but can say, "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." He knows also that the event cannot be far off—and may be very near.

And is this all that we are apprized of? No. We also know that God will be found the same he always has been—We know that he will always prove himself the hearer of prayer—We know that he will never leave us nor forsake us—We know that our shoes shall be iron and brass; and as our days so shall our strength be—We know that he will guide us with his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory.

JANUARY 2.

"*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"—2 Cor. vi. 2.

The importance of opportunity is readily acknowledged, and generally if not universally acted upon, with regard to temporal things. The seafaring man, with prudence and diligence, avails himself of the winds and the tides. The husbandman, when the precious produce of the field is to be secured, is all anxiety and eagerness, lest he should lose a shining hour—and hence it early became a proverb, "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son, he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." There are interesting conjunctures, and peculiar seasons, which never return; but, according as they are seized or neglected, decide the reputation and the condition of a man for life. But *here* we have an opportunity announced, as superior to every other opportunity, in its relations and consequences, as the soul is superior to the body, and eternity to time—an opportunity to gain acceptance with God, and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ—"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

This "now" takes in the whole period of the gospel dispensation, or the duration of the mediatorial reign of Christ. He is now exalted at the right hand of God to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins. He is the great High Priest over the house of God, to introduce our persons and services; and while we are reconciled by his death we are saved by his life. For he is now living a life of office as well as of glory.—But this will not continue always. It is commensurate only with the continuance of the world. "Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father." This, in the

whole of it, is a very extensive period. It has continued long, and will probably continue many ages longer. But this can only encourage us with regard to mankind successionally. It is delightful to think that what those have found the Saviour to be who went before, those also will find him to be that shall come after us: for he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." But as individuals, our season is far less lengthened—at death, the angel swears, with regard to us, that "time shall be no longer."

This "now" therefore is to be considered as the period of life. Patients have been recovered when they seemed incurable, and have been sent back from the very borders of the grave. Persons have been resuscitated when the functions of nature had ceased, and the principle of life seemed extinguished. So some have been saved at the eleventh hour, and they have adored the long-suffering of God which proved their salvation—But the redemption of the soul is precious, and after our present state, ceaseth for ever. If there be hope to persons then, it is among the reserves of Divine goodness; He has not been pleased to reveal it. Origen and his brethren of the same sentiment were called the merciful doctors: but should their notion be a mistake, and those that rely upon it be confounded for ever, *they* ought to be called the merciful doctors who, knowing the terror of the Lord, persuade men to flee from the wrath to come. But in this view how precious and all-important is life—

> "Life is the time to serve the Lord,
> The time to insure the great reward;
> And while the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return."

And how instantly and zealously should we avail ourselves of the only season! Especially when we consider how short, and how uncertain the continuance of it is. Another of the threescore years and ten, or of the fifty, or forty, or twenty that measures the whole extent, is gone,—

> "And every beating pulse we tell,
> Leaves but the number less."

And O my soul! how many strokes remain. There is but a step between me and death—

> "Great God! on what a slender thread
> Hang everlasting things!
> The eternal state of all the dead
> Upon life's feeble strings!"

But this "now," takes in, as distinguished from life at large, every period peculiarly favourable to religion. Youth is such a period. The young have fewer of the cares that perplex and engross us as we plunge deeper into the concerns of this life. Their hearts, though evil, are not yet hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Their consciences, though defiled, are not yet seared as with a hot iron. Their memories, though limited, are not yet choked up with the lumber of the world. Their affections are warm; their strength is firm; their connexions are as yet optional; life is fresh; nature is inviting—and amidst all these advantages, Grace says, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth: while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."—Such a period is the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man. It befriends his civil comfort, his bodily health, and his mental improvement. But it chiefly regards his spiritual and eternal welfare. What a gracious appointment, to draw us once a week out of the world for a whole day—to afford us leisure to examine our character and condition before God—to remind us, in the midst of all other engagements, that one thing is needful—and to urge us, by a thousand motives, "to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from us." How many have found "the Holy of the Lord," an accepted time, and a day of salvation!—Affliction is also such a period. It matters not from whence our troubles arise; they are designed for our profit—"In their affliction they will seek me early." They also naturally tend to impress the mind and soften the heart. They show us the evil of sin, and the vanity of the world; and the need we have of a better home than earth, and a better arm than flesh. Many have been chosen in the furnace of affliction beside Manasseh. How foolish to wish to get our trials removed without their being sanctified! How lamentable to lose the benefit of such a season!—Such is a period of religious excitement. It is said in the Gospel, "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." And when we see others seeking and finding; delivered from the stings of a guilty conscience, and the tyranny of their passions; becoming meek and patient and peaceful and happy; does it not powerfully call upon us to "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew:" and to pray to the God of all grace, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father?"—Such is the period in which conscience has been awakened and impressed. Perhaps you have had, more than once, such views and feelings, that it has been said of you, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." It was thus with Felix when he trembled. He felt then as he had never felt before, and as he never felt afterwards. But instead of cherishing the conviction, he endeavoured to banish it—and succeeded. Go thy way, said he to the Preacher, for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee. That season never came. He saw Paul indeed several times afterwards, but not a word was said concerning the faith in Christ! Beware: your impressions may die away, and never

revive. But can you complain? Did you not oppose or neglect them? Beware! All good is from God, but he will not be trifled with. "My Spirit will not always strive with man." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

JANUARY 3.

"Which things the angels desire to look into."
1 Pet. i. 12.

Had we only heard of such an order of beings as angels, with all the attributes the Scripture ascribes to them; and then have been told, that there were several subjects with which they were intensely anxious to be acquainted; how eagerly should we have inquired what these things were! And had we been left to conjecture, it is probable we should have been led astray—yea, it is certain we should have been led astray, had we conjectured under the influence of the spirit of the world. For what do they study? What do merchants, princes, statesmen, study? What do the sons of science and learning study? What are the acquirements, by proficiency in which, men are distinguished among their fellow-creatures, and left on the pinnacle of fame?—But what do *angels* desire to look into? The arts of trade? the secrets of government? the researches of philosophy? the mysteries of nature? No. But the salvation of sinners; the grace of God; the sufferings and glory of Christ—"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

Now this fact is announced, not for our amusement, but profit. It shows us what is the necessary condition of all creatures, however high in the scale of being. It is a state of dependence, deficiency, and progressive improvement. Some imagine, as soon as we enter heaven we shall reach an ultimatum beyond which there will be no additions to our knowledge or enjoyment. Such a stagnation of existence, devoid of prospect, energy, and excitement, would be far from desirable, if it were possible—but it is not possible. The future life is called "that which is perfect;" and it *is* perfect, compared with the present: but it is not absolutely so. There is only one Being who is absolutely perfect, whose duration is not lengthened by time, and whose knowledge is not increased by discovery. Nothing is past or future with Him. His understanding is infinite. But angels are creatures, and therefore finite in their faculties as well as we. He chargeth his angels with folly. There are many things of which they are ignorant. Our Lord assures us they know not the day of judgment. The book in the Revelations, whatever were the mysteries it contained, was closed to angels as well as men: for no one in *heaven* as well as in the earth was able to open the book and to look therein, till it was unsealed by the Lord of all. Angels know much now of which they were formerly unconscious, and fresh springs of knowledge and enjoyment are continually opening to them, and calling for a new song of wonder and of praise.

Does it not also show us the vastness of the Gospel? A very inferior master may teach the ignorant; but the honour is to be able to instruct the wise and learned. We should think very highly of one who could have improved Handel in music, and Milton in poetry, and Newton in philosophy. But angels are the flower of the Creation; they are always spoken of in Scripture as proverbial for their knowledge; they are the first beings in the universe for intelligence; and are as much above men in their powers as the heavens are higher than the earth. If to these principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God; if the Gospel can teach *them*—if it can enlighten and enlarge *their* views—if it draws forth *their* wonder and astonishment; how well may it be called "the deep things of God;" "the wisdom of God in a mystery!" If after having been employed in the works of God, and the administrations of his providence, from the beginning; if after all the scenes which have passed under their review for so many ages; if after seeing dispensation succeeding dispensation, in the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian economies; if after seeing the fulness of time, and the divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost; if after all this they were still, as Peter asserts, diligently exploring the Gospel, how does it aggrandize the system! This is the system which some suppose may be readily reduced into a form of words drawn up by a fallible man! This is the system whose bounds some imagine they can easily reach, and whose depths they can perfectly fathom! But were they angels, they would exclaim, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

We learn also the excellency as well as the vastness, the value as well as the immensity of the Gospel. Would such beings as these trifle? Does not their attention

prove that the subject is worthy of all acceptation? Why do they study it, but because it is "the Gospel of our salvation;" but because it is "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God;" but because, in redeeming Jacob, he has glorified himself in Israel; but because they find displayed in this scheme more of all his perfections than is to be seen in all his other works? We cannot justly infer the worth of a thing from the attention paid to it by men. They may be compelled by authority, biased by interest, governed by vanity, or led astray by novelty. Even great men have had their follies. Nothing has been brought forward so absurd as not to have attracted to it some names of distinction. And we have always proof enough that to be learned and knowing is not always to be wise. But no objection can lie against the inference we here draw—If angels desire to look into these things, the things deserve to be looked into.

And therefore let us learn what is our duty with regard to them.—Is it not to be thankful that we are favoured with the dispensation of them? Blessed are our eyes for they see, and our ears for they hear.—Is it not to study them ourselves? We are deeply, we are infinitely concerned in them. The being to whom they relate is our Saviour. His history is the record of our eternal redemption. He became poor; he died for us. Let us therefore turn aside from the little, the vain, the vexing, the debasing, the defiling things of the world, and contemplate the great mystery of godliness. Let us never be weary in reading, in hearing of it. And let us not rest in a speculative acquaintance with it; but taste that the Lord is gracious; and walk in the truth.—Is it not to own them and confess them and glory in them before men? I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ—angels are my companions. Is it not to pray that the knowledge of them may be extended, and that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God together?

JANUARY 4.

"Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me."—Gen. xlii. 36.

This was a very sorrowful conclusion; but no part of it was founded in truth. "Joseph is not"—yes he is—and not only alive—but riding in the second chariot of Egypt. "And Simeon is not"—yes he is—and only detained for awhile as an hostage for the return of his brethren. "And ye will take Benjamin away"—yes—but not to be destroyed—but to prove a deliverer—and to bring every thing to a favourable issue. Let the lad go—and no evil shall befall him—and supplies for thyself and family will soon be brought—and the wagons shall accompany them, sent by Joseph, to carry thee and thy household down into Goshen—where he will nourish thee—and after the storms of the morning and afternoon of life, thou shalt enjoy a calm and clear evening—and rejoice in the developement of a series of dispensations beyond all that thou couldest ask or think. And what say you now, Jacob? "I have spoken once, but I will proceed no further. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!—He hath done all things well."

The inference here so groundlessly drawn is not peculiar to Jacob. Nothing is more common than to hear the subjects of Divine grace exclaim, "All these things are against me," when yet "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth;" and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Whence does it proceed? Sometimes they judge under a morbid physical influence. We are not only fearfully, but wonderfully made; and there are many things which would hardly appear credible were they not confirmed by frequent experience. How will a change of weather, or a redundancy or increase of some secretion or fluid, affect not only our feelings, but our views! How tenderly are some to be pitied! How much they constantly suffer from corporeal causes! They see every thing through an injured medium; and there is no persuading them often but that the discolourations of the glass are the hues of the objects themselves.

They often err from a deficiency of knowledge with regard to the subject itself. It is not easy to determine what is against us, or for us. "Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life?" Can we always distinguish between appearances and realities? Between the beginning and the end of things? Do we perfectly know ourselves? Or what effects untried things will have upon our minds or our condition? We go forward into futurity with our present views and feelings, not reflecting that other events will produce other views and feelings, and that by circumstances we may become a kind of new creatures, which, could they be presented to us in prospect, would occasion more than our wonder. This was the case with Hazael: he abhorred in imagination what he became in reality, by

a transition from a private to a public station. What miseries did Lot entail upon himself in choosing the vale of Sodom, because it was well watered as the garden of the Lord! On the other hand, Ruth was early deprived of her husband, and reduced to the lowliness of a gleaner, but met with Boaz in the field, and became the ancestor of the Messiah. A man wished to sail in a particular ship, and to his extreme disappointment, found, when he reached the port, that the vessel had just sailed—the next day it was wrecked! and his anguish was turned into joy.

We draw the conclusion also, because we are carnal, and walk as men. We regard our ease and indulgence more than our spiritual advantage. If the hedging up of our way with thorns prevents us from going astray, if the sickness of the body secures the health of the soul, if the loss of a creature brings us to God, surely we cannot say these things are against us. They are greatly for us; and we should acknowledge this, if we were wise unto salvation, and had our conversation in heaven.

We also err by judging prematurely. "He that believeth maketh not haste." If a man engaged to accomplish a great work in ten years, would it be right to decide concerning it at the end of ten days, or ten weeks? God did not pronounce judgment upon his own Creation till it was done: "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." The end will not only crown all, but explain all; and produce not only satisfaction, but praise. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come. And the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. And blessed are all they that wait for him. In the mean while, there is a substitute for the explanations of heaven. It is, in the absence of sight, to walk by faith. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. But by believing we enter into rest, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Under the influence of this faith, let us look at his promises; let us think of his perfections; let us review his wonders of old—above all, let us keep near the cross. All our discouragements and perplexities originate in our departure from this. God forbid we should glory in any thing else. It not only opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers, but it is the key to unlock the dispensations of providence. If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things. God of love! Thou shalt have all the future confidence of our hearts—

> Our cares, we give ye to the wind,
> And shake you off like dust;
> Well may we trust our all with Him,
> With whom our souls we trust."

JANUARY 5.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is."—Mark xiii. 33.

It is the langaage of Jesus, to whom it behoves us always to say, with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." The Christian welcomes his voice, not only in his promises, but in his commands; and not only when he encourages and comforts, but when he reproves and admonishes.

Here he tells us to take heed. We may consider the caution, First, as to the manner in which it is to be exercised—"Watch and pray." Watchfulness is wakefulness in opposition to sleep; attentiveness in opposition to neglect; and perceptiveness in opposition to stupidity. To watchfulness is added prayer. Vigilance will not do alone. We must not only be active, but humble. We must not only use means, but depend upon the influence that is necessary to render them effectual; and seek it of Him who never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain.

Secondly, as to the season for which it is to be a preparation, and by which it is to be enforced: "for ye know not when the time is." Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *duty* is. Who can tell, when he leaves his home for a journey, or only for a day, what opportunities, before he returns, may arise to relieve the distressed, to comfort the feeble-minded, to oppose error, or to rebuke vice: opportunities which may never return, and should never be neglected? David therefore said, "On Thee do I wait all the day;" for he knew not what the great Master had for him to do. Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *danger* is. If we consider the enemy of our souls, the world in which we live, and the sin that dwelleth in us, we may safely conclude that we are never far from temptation. Joseph, in the court of Pharaoh, learned to swear by the life of Pharaoh. Moses, the meekest man upon earth, under irritation, spake unadvisedly with his lips. Even in old age, Solomon's heart, by outlandish women, was drawn away from God. Peter, immediately after the most solemn warnings and professions, denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation of the Jews. Paul was likely to be exalted above measure, by the abundance of his revelations. We are sure to be in danger, whenever we deem ourselves secure: for pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Blessed is the man that feareth alway. Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *trouble* is. To this we are born; and therefore we cannot think our trials strange things. Who can tell what a day may bring forth? An accident, a disease, a loss in our circumstances, a family bereavement may befall us

without warning—"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." And what, if it finds us unprepared! Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *death* is. The day of trouble may come, the day of death will come: and it is the most solemn and important of all days. For death is not the termination of our being, but only a change of the mode of it, or a transition from a mortal to an immortal state. Then the dust returns to the dust whence it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it; and is disposed of according to our character here; for after death the judgment. The time of our dissolution is not a secret with God; and we are sure that it cannot be far off; but each of us must say, with Isaac, "I know not the day of my death." It may be in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. What then is the language of wisdom? Be ye therefore ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

JANUARY 6.

"*Philip, saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*"—John xiv. 8.

How are we to understand this request? We can hardly suppose, with some, that he desired a kind of personal representation of the Deity. Surely he could not be so ignorant as to imagine that God was in his essence visible, or that he could be held forth under any corporeal form or shape; especially as the Jews—and Philip was a Jew—were forbidden every attempt to make any likeness of the Supreme Being. It is more probable, that he wished for some glorious display of God's presence and perfections, as Moses had done, and which he called God's face. If so, he knew not what he asked. The exhibition might have been fatal. "No man," says God who knows our frame, "can see my face and live." Such a display of himself as he makes to the saints in light, would be insupportable in this weak state of flesh and blood. It certainly might have been useless. The Jews *had* such an exhibition of God, in the cloud of glory; but they corrupted themselves, and went after strange gods. Extraordinary and miraculous appearances would lose their impression, yea, by their repetition, they would be extraordinary and miraculous no longer. This is not the way in which God is to be known. Yet let us not revile Philip, concluding that we have never been liable to a like mistake. Have we never wanted a kind of immediate and sensible conviction that would exclude all possibility of doubt? Have we never been ready to exclaim, "Oh! if, with an audible voice, He would say, go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee! Oh! if one who has passed the valley of the shadow of death would return; or some inhabitant of the world of spirits would assure me of a future state!" Ah! foolish wish. We have Moses and the prophets—Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.

But some, and among these is Doddridge, are disposed to commend rather than censure Philip. They take his meaning to be, "Oh! bring us to the knowledge of the blessed God, and we resign every other wish as nothing compared with this!"—much in the spirit of David, who had said of him, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Philip, therefore, only asks for a fuller manifestation and enjoyment of him—"Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

Yet can he be shown? or, in other words, can he be known? It is true, Zophar asks, "Who by searching can find out God?" But he adds, "who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" He cannot be completely known: but he can be really known, savingly known; known as the strength of *our* heart, and *our* portion for ever. And this knowledge can yield satisfaction to the possessor. It will suffice for our happiness hereafter: and, therefore, the blessedness is expressed by our seeing God; and therefore David says, "I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Yea, it suffices the Christian at present. He can now say, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips: when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches."

> "When I can say, my God is mine,
> When I can feel thy glories shine,
> I tread the world beneath my feet,
> And all that earth calls good or great."

It suffices—to teach him in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content—to embolden him in his work, in the face of all opposition and danger—to sustain him under every trial—and to raise him above the fear of death. Moses endured as seeing Him that is invisible. And Simeon was ready to depart in peace because his eyes had seen His salvation.

But this knowledge is to be derived from the Lord Jesus. "No one knoweth who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which was in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him." Some would rather look for God in the world of nature; but the Apostle tells us that "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He shows us the Father by

his person—He is the image of the invisible God. By His sacrifice—in which we see so fully and harmoniously displayed his wisdom, holiness, righteousness, truth, and love. By His word—the most illiterate Christian, with "the word of Christ" in his hand, knows more of God than all the philosophers of Greece and Rome. How much does He teach us concerning God as the God of grace by the parable of the prodigal son! And how much does he teach us concerning God as the God of providence by one saying; "a sparrow falleth not to the ground without your heavenly Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered." By the Spirit—this Spirit leads us into all truth; and it is the Spirit of Christ. We have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things.

Therefore to Him we are to apply, as Philip here did, and pray, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." He requires it from us: and He assures us our application shall not be in vain. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find. He never has been, never will be, never can be wanting to the promise upon which he causes us to hope. "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

JANUARY 7.

"And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."—Luke xvii. 5.

If we consider these words—In reference to *the Being* to whom they were addressed—"The *Lord:*" they teach us that He is the source of grace; and the object of worship.—If in reference to *the persons* who addressed Him—"The *Apostles:*" they teach us that even the Lord's disciples themselves have their imperfections; but feel them; and are concerned to be freed from them.—If in reference to *the subject* they express—"our *faith:*" they teach us that faith is not finished at once; it admits of degrees; and higher measures of it are attainable.—If in reference to *the occasion* which excited them—our *Saviour's preceding charge:* they teach us that an increase of faith is not only always desirable, but sometimes necessary. Observe what He had been enforcing. "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"—"*And* the Apostles said unto the Lord, increase our faith"—and thus enable us to do it. But why faith in particular? Why not increase our humility? love? patience? Because faith is the root from which they grow, and as faith abounds, they will flourish. Because all things are possible to him that believeth. Forgiveness, so irksome to mere nature, will be practicable and easy as faith is in exercise, and we can believe not only the testimony that if we forgive not, we shall not be forgiven, but the assurance that God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Can we, who have had remitted ten thousand talents, seize a fellow servant by the throat, who owes us only a hundred pence?

But there are many other cases, the pressure of which will make us feel that we want more faith than we have at present; and should induce us to pray for an increase of it.

Has the Saviour said that He will deny those who are ashamed of Him and of His words? And does He require us to own and confess Him before men? And will this give offence to our connexions? and draw upon ourselves persecution and reproach? This is the work of faith; and will only be practicable and easy as faith increases—"We ought," said Peter and John, "to obey God rather than men." "We cannot but speak the things which we see and hear." "They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." "By faith Moses feared not the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

Are you called to sacrifice an object, that nature will never let go, without violence? "By *faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up *Isaac.*"

Are you called to confide in God in great straits and difficulties—when His providence seems to oppose His promise—when means fail—and there seems no way of escape—when He says, "Come, follow me through this dark dispensation. You are ignorant; but I know the way that you take. Here is my arm, feel this; lean on this. The sorrow shall turn to your salvation, the trial shall be your triumph. The end will show that I am very pitiful and of tender mercy, and constrain you to say, 'it is good for me that I have been afflicted.'" What is all this without faith? "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

How solemn was the order addressed to Moses, "Go up and die, and be gathered to thy people!" By years, infirmities, and disease, God is calling you to the same service—The living know that they shall die. And what is it to die? We know not, from our own experience, or the experience of others. But to bid farewell to every earthly scene—to be surrounded with weeping friends, whose presence we can neither dispense with, or endure—to bear sinking spirits and a body full of pain—to feel perhaps our unworthiness and sin more than we ever

felt them before—to enter into an untried and eternal state—to think of appearing before Purity itself—to be resigned and willing to go—to do well what can never be done again—to glorify God—to edify others—to be an example to the last, and above all at the last—"Lord—Lord! increase our faith." "Count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of Thy goodness, and the WORK OF FAITH WITH POWER."

JANUARY 8.

"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye."—Zech. ii. 8.

How admirably adapted to popular instruction and impression is the imagery of the Scripture! It is not taken from the learned sciences, or even from the mechanical arts—unless from their most simple and common operations with which all mankind are familiar: but from the aspects of nature, the seasons of the year, the occurrences of life, and the parts, attributes, and functions of the human frame so fearfully and wonderfully made. Who does not in a moment understand and feel the allusion before us? "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye."

It reminds us of union. Sin had separated between God and us, and we were once far off. But we are made nigh by the blood of Christ. In Him we are reconciled to God, reunited to God, and become one with God again. And so entire is the connexion, that every kind of intimate union is employed to express it. We are one, as the father and the child, as the husband and the wife, as the head and the members are one—yea, as the soul and the body are one—"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"—no wonder therefore that he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of His eye.

It shows valuation. Even a man's selfishness endears this member. The apple of his eye is a source of too much usefulness and pleasure not to be highly prized by him. He would part with a thousand things rather than lose this, or be injured in any part rather than be hurt in this. How precious to the Lord are his people! He calls them His portion, His jewels, His glory. They who attract and attach Him, are not the great but the gracious—"To that man," says He, "will I look, who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." He "taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy." "He will rejoice over them with joy, He will rest in his love, He will joy over them with singing."

It bespeaks attention. As a man values the apple of his eye, so will he assuredly take care of it, and endeavour to defend it. And it is worthy of our notice how the Creator has fenced and guarded this little, but inestimably precious member from evil by the fluids and the coats, the lashes and the lids; and with what involuntary quickness nature teaches us to cover and secure it when exposed. Yet all this falls short of the care which God exercises over His people. The apple of the eye is not half so liable to injury as they are; but how superior is their protection! Lest any hurt them, He will keep them night and day. In two places His vigilance is spoken of under the figure before us. In the one it is implored: "Keep me," says David, "as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings." In the other, it is acknowledged: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye." How well kept are those whom God thus keeps! "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

It expresses sympathy. The pupil of the eye is peculiarly delicate and sensible: and it is not necessary to run the point of a knife into it, in order to make the owner shrink. A mote, or, as it is here expressed, a touch, will offend, and instantly affect all his sensation. And is it not said, "In all their affliction He is afflicted?" A friend sympathizes in a friend's sorrow: a mother feels a more sensible interest in a child's suffering. Yet Job says, "My friends scorn me:" and Isaiah says, the mother "may forget" her sucking child, and "not have compassion on the son of her womb." But a man's feeling with an injured member of his body, especially the eye, and the apple of the eye, is not only exquisite, but absolutely unavoidable. And not less certain, as well as tender, is the Lord's sympathy with his people—"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." What a source of consolation is here! Especially when we remember that His sympathy is accompanied with boundless wisdom and almighty power. "He doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number—to set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." "Nothing is too hard for the Lord."

Let the adversaries of His people learn their danger. They hate the godly, and endeavour to injure them; and though their malice is often restrained, the Lord looketh at the heart, and will deal with them according to their intentions, wishes, and endeavours. And He considers them as opposing *Himself*. "Why," said He to Saul, "why persecutest thou *Me?*" He did not persecute Him *personally*, but he was in-

juring His followers. The head was above his reach. but it felt the wounds he inflicted upon the foot. They who suffer for His sake, may well leave themselves to Him, whose they are, and whom they serve. He will surely plead their cause—"He that toucheth them toucheth the apple of His eye."

Let this encourage us to do any thing for the people of God—He feels it as done to Himself. He "is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "He," said the Saviour, "he that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Let his people also learn their duty. They see how He regards them, and is concerned for their welfare—How should they regard Him, and be concerned for His glory! They should feel His cause to be dear to them. They should be sorrowful for the solemn assembly. The reproaches of them that reproach Him should fall upon them.

Those that represent strict piety as needless precision, should remember that nothing less is required of us than to avoid the appearance of evil, to walk circumspectly, and to be always abounding in the work of the Lord—We are to regard His word as we keep the tenderest part of the tenderest member of our body. "Keep my commandments, and live; and MY LAW AS THE APPLE OF THINE EYE."

JANUARY 9.

"*Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.*"—Psalm lxxiv. 14.

WHAT creature in the animal world is intended by leviathan we cannot absolutely determine. We have a general description of him in the book of Job; but even this leaves the learned divided, some pleading for the crocodile and some for the whale. But it is not necessary to be a naturalist in order to be a Christian; and it is pleasing to think that though in the Scripture there are things hard to be understood, they do not affect the foundation of our faith and hope. The truths contained in the sacred volume are plain in proportion as they are profitable, and we are at no loss for an answer to the question, What must I do to be saved? Though we know not where heaven is, we are clearly informed how we may attain it. Though we are uncertain about leviathan, we are sure of the Consolation of Israel—"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Whatever be the animal intended, his name is here used to represent Pharaoh with all his policy and power, as we see from the verse immediately preceding: "Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength: Thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters." Then it is added: "Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." Who were the people inhabiting the wilderness? First, the birds and beasts of the desert. These found a fine feast in the destruction of the king and his army, whose carcasses, thrown on shore and remaining unburied, were greedily devoured by them. Secondly, the Jews themselves. They might very properly be said to inhabit the wilderness, because it was their present residence, and because they were, instead of speedily traveling through it, to sojurn there for forty years. —Now Pharaoh and his host became meat for them, literally and morally. *Literally*, as they derived from the spoils of the foe a supply of means to sustain them, of attire to clothe them, of weapons to defend them, of silver, and gold, and jewels, to enrich them. *Morally*, as they derived from the event food for their gratitude, faith, hope, and joy, not only for the time being, when they sang His praise, but in all future perils and exigences. Hence in the days of Isaiah we find the Church pleading with God in allusion to it: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

There is a people now, inhabiting the wilderness. They are Christians. Whatever the world may be to others, and who are called "men of the world," it is no better than a wilderness to those who are born from above, and bound to the land of promise. They feel and confess it to be such, not only from the privations and trials they meet with in it, but from the principles and dispositions of their new nature.

And is there no leviathan whose heads have been broken in pieces for them, and from

which they have been furnished with meat? Are there no past deliverances, no former mercies, upon which their souls can feed! Let us think of the redemption of the cross. Here the Lord and Saviour seemed conquered, but he gained a complete victory. He bruised the serpent's head; and through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Now, said He, is the judgment of this world, now is the Prince of this world cast out; and I if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. Angels are not concerned here, and yet the transaction seems food for their minds, and fills them with admiration, love, and praise; and therefore they desire to look into these things. What relief and satisfaction then must it yield to those who live thereby! To see the curse not only defeated, but turned into a blessing; to see where sin abounded grace much more abounding, and the Fall made the occasion of improving their original condition—what wonder if they exclaim, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We may also notice their deliverance from their natural state. He hath delivered us, says the Apostle, from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. And we are to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we are digged. The review will be every way useful. What can feed our *humility* more? or our *gratitude* more? or our *confidence* more? or our *rejoicing* more? or our *zeal* more?

There are also Providential interpositions. Who has not some of these to remember; in which God turned the shadow of death into morning; and made a way the most strange and gracious for our escape? Whoso is wise, observes these things; and in looking back upon life, is able to see how many events, which perplexed and alarmed him at the time, afterward ministered to his faith and hope in God. David could say, it is good for me that I have been afflicted. Paul had a thorn in the flesh; but it preserved him from pride, drove him to prayer, and obtained for him the assurance of all-sufficient grace. What pleasure and profit must Joseph have derived from all the difficulties that tried him, yet issued not only in release, but advancement and glory! He can break the heads of any leviathan; and out of the eater bring forth meat—

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face."

JANUARY 10.

"*He is not far from every one of us.*"
Acts xvii. 27.

Is there a God? This is the first question in religion. And the proofs of his Being are so numerous and convincing, that few are foolish and vile enough to deny it. The next question is, or at least ought to be, How does He stand related to us? Is He our friend or our foe? Is He inaccessible, or can we approach Him! Is He near, or is He far off? To this inquiry, we have here a full answer —"He is not far from ever one of us."

He is not far from every one of us, in His essence. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence! If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." Well might David say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Yet Deism itself allows that He occupies universal space, and that it is impossible to confine Him. Here is a broad and infinite distinction between creatures and God. No creature, not even an angel, can be ever in two places at once. But God is everywhere, at the same time. And what a thought is it, that wherever we are, He is a God at hand, and not a God afar off; about our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all the imaginations of our heart! Do we believe it? If we reduced our faith to practice, what manner of creatures should we be in all holy conversation and godliness! Could we ever sin, with God standing by and looking on?

He is not far from every one of us, in His natural and providential agency—Therefore, adds the Apostle, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." And therefore, says he again; "He never left himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." And says David, "That His Name is near, His wondrous works declare." Can we behold the appearances around us—can we observe the vegetable world with all its variety and beauty—can we think of the myriads possessing animal life, visible and invisible, in air and earth and sea—can we reflect upon the human race so fearfully and wonderfully made and endued—and know that not one of all these beings is self-produced, or self-sustained—that the eyes of all wait upon *Him*, and *He* giveth them their meat in due season —that *He* openeth his hand and satisfieth the desires of every living thing; and be senseless enough not to see, to hear, to feel—that God is not far from every one of us?

He is not far from every one of us, in religious dispensation. In this sense the Gentiles were said to be far off: but the Jews were a people near unto Him—For what nation is there, says Moses, that hath God so nigh unto them? He resided in the midst of them by His laws and ordinances. They could see His power and glory in His sanctuary. They could hear His voice in His

Prophets. To them were committed the oracles of God. In every perplexity they could consult Him; and He communed with them from off the mercy-seat. Thus we are equally, yea, much more eminently privileged. Not that we have the same ceremonial splendour, or the same miraculous interpositions; but we have all their spiritual advantages improved and completed. We have the day of their dawn. Their prophets and righteous men desired to see the things that we see, and did not see them; and to hear the things that we hear, and did not hear them. But blessed are our eyes for they see, and our ears for they hear. The seventy therefore were to say even to Jews, the possessors of revealed religion, "the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." We have His word in our hands. We have His sabbaths. We have His house. We have the assemblies of His people, and He is in the midst of them. We have His table spread with more than angels' food, and the King sitteth at His table. We have His servants, and the sound of their Master's feet is behind them. For they come in His name, and he that receiveth them receiveth Him.

He is not far from every one of us, in His gracious influences. O that you could be made sensible of your fallen condition, and of your need of pardon and renovation! O that you were convinced that your understanding must be enlightened, and your hearts changed —and that all this must come from Him who worketh all in all—and that you were disposed to apply to Him! You would soon find that He is able, that He is willing, that He is near. Your cries or groans would instantly reach Him. He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. He is nigh unto them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. But in this, He will not be always near. Therefore seek Him *while* He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. And learn here also the true cause of your condemnation if you perish. It is not because you are lost creatures and are unable to save yourselves; but because there is a Saviour within your reach, and you refuse to apply to him, and will not take hold of his strength. How came the man without the wedding garment to be speechless? Could he not have said that it was out of his power to weave one, or that he was too poor to purchase one? This alone would have been some excuse. But the fact was, that garments were provided in the wardrobe, and he might have had one, as he passed by, for asking. But he neglected the provision, and was punished, not for his indigence, but presumption.

He is not far from every one of us, as an approaching Judge. People imagine his advent is a great way off, and hence they are so little impressed by it. But "the coming of the Lord draws nigh." "The Lord is at hand." "The Judge standeth before the door." This was said almost two thousand years ago. What then is the fact now? Yet say some, it cannot be even now very near, for much remains to be previously accomplished. But God does not act according to our conclusions. He can cut short his work in righteousness. But let us allow the truth contained in the objection. Yet his coming by death is the same to you in effect, as his coming at the last day. As soon as you are dead, as to *you*, the prophecies are all accomplished, and your state is fixed. There is no pardon, no prayer, after death—after death the judgment. And is death far off? The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Many never reach this general average. But allowing the term to be generally true. Take seventy years. Yet what right have many of you to think your Judge is far off? You are sixty-five, you are sixty-nine; that is within five, that is within one year of his coming. But take persons at any age—take them in middle life; take them in youth—yet when you reflect upon the brittleness of your frame, and the countless accidents and diseases to which you are exposed every moment, you must acknowledge that there is but a step between you and death—between you and the Judge of all!

JANUARY 11.

"*For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*"—Heb. ii. 11.

WHAT cause? Read the former part of the verse. "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all *of one*." There is a spiritual union or oneness between Christ and Christians—They are of one God and Father. They are of one spirit. They are of one taste; one aim; one pursuit. They have one destination; and will appear with him in glory—"Where I am," says he, "there shall also my servants be." But the meaning is here determined by the context—they are of one *nature*. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."—This exception was not only necessary, but possible: and as Adam before his fall possessed truly the same nature with us yet sinless, so provision was made for the Saviour's participation of it, in the same immaculate way: and from the manner of his conception by the Holy Ghost, his humanity was the "holy thing" born of the Virgin Mary; and he is called the "holy child Jesus;" and it is said, not only that "he did no sin," but "in him

was no sin." This becoming one with us in nature is without controversy a great mystery, but it is a mystery of godliness. It is the medium of our salvation. It is thus he speaks to us without making us afraid. It is thus he is capable of sympathizing with us, and gains our confidence. It is thus he becomes our example and goes before us in the path of duty and suffering; and he can give his life a ransom for us, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Men unconvinced of their state, may treat the doctrine with neglect or contempt; but says Paul, "We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us *through the vail, that is to say, His flesh.*"

For this cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren—And why should He be ashamed, seeing He is of one nature with them? It will not be difficult to find a reason. Though He is truly a man, He is more than human. The Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh. And there is a great difference between Him and us, in the same nature. There are not only degrees among angels, but also among men; and these distinctions are sanctioned by Scripture, which requires us to render to all their due; honour to whom honour is due, and fear to whom fear—"I said, ye are gods." A king is of the same nature with the lowest of his subjects; is made of the same clay; and can no more dispense with food and sleep than they—yet does he call them brethren? Do we not deem it almost a miracle to see a prince condescend to men of low estate? A commander in chief will speak of his brother officers; but he does not call the common soldiers brethren. The judge in court will call a counsellor brother; but not the prisoner at the bar. Though Christ has our nature, He is so exalted and glorious, that He may well disavow the nearness of our relationship according to the feelings and usages of the world. Humanity in Him is worthy, but in us undeserving. In Him it is spotless, in us it is defiled. God is angry with us; in Him, He is well pleased—He always did the things that pleased Him. We are mortal, and crushed before the moth; but He dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him—He is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high.

For we must consider not what He was, but what He now is. While all the members of a family are in obscurity, they all feel the same towards each other; but if one of them be elevated, as David was, to the highest condition in the state, *he* may be easily tempted to shame, in acknowledging the rest who are left so much below him. But though Jesus is passed into the heavens, and angels, principalities, and powers, are made subject unto Him, and every name that is named not only in this world but that which is to come, He *is* touched with the feeling of our infirmities; He *is* not ashamed to call us brethren. It is indeed observable that it was after his resurrection He gave his disciples this name: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee." "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." And when He comes in his glory, and before Him will be gathered all nations, even as the Judge of all, He will not be ashamed to say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

Let this thought dignify us. The honour will not make us proud, since by the grace of God we are what we are; and the more we have, the more we owe.

Let it console and encourage us. If He calls Himself our brother, He will perform all that the relation implies and requires in its most perfect discharge. He will correspond with us. He will visit us. He will defend us. He will provide for us. Joseph supported all his father's house; and because he lives we shall live also.

And if He is not ashamed to own us—shall we ever be ashamed to acknowledge Him? "He that is ashamed of me, and my words, in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in the clouds of heaven with the holy angels." But surely terror is not necessary here—surely ingenuousness, affected with a sense of our dependence and obligations, will be enough to induce us to say,

> "Ashamed of Jesus! of that Friend
> On whom my heavenly hopes depend!
> It must not be—be this my shame.
> That I no more revere His name."

JANUARY 12.

"*In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.*"—Dan. v. 30.

OBSERVE the person—the event—and the season.

The person was Belshazzar. He is not easily identified in profane history, and little is said of him in the Scriptures of Truth. He was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Merodach Baladin was his father. His mother was Nitocris, a woman of a masculine understanding, and to whose counsel he was much indebted. He appears in the sacred story like a man by the way-side, hung in irons. The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot, or if preserved, it is perpetuated in disgrace. The noticing of some persons is renown, of others is infamy. Amyot, Bishop of Auxyene, and

great almoner of France, not long before his death, was urged to write the history of his country, "I love my sovereigns too well," said he, "to write their lives." Let us so live, as, when dead, we may yet speak, or be spoken of, to our honour, and the improvement of others.

The event—he "was slain." Though a king, and even called "The King of kings," he yields to "the King of terrors." I said, ye are gods; but ye shall die like men, and be as one of the princes. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." The dwellers in dust, who had once trembled before Him, are represented as insulting the king of Babylon. "Art *thou* also become weak as *we?* Art *thou* become like unto *us?* Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee"—What a change! —But observe, not only his death, but the manner of it. He might have died in a good old age, and gradually, and in a peaceful bed —but he is cut off prematurely, suddenly, and violently—he was *slain.*

When? "That night." What night? The night of his festivity. He had made a great feast unto a thousand of his lords, and music, and dancing, and every kind of indulgence filled the palace. How little did he suspect the vicinage of danger; of death! Marriage rites have sometimes been prevented, or immediately followed by funeral solemnities. A man has built and embellished a mansion, and prepared an entertainment to crown his wishes; but instead of taking possession of it, he has entered the house appointed for all living. Another has planned a favourite journey, but at the very commencement of it, he has been turned into the way of all the earth. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." That night was the king of the Chaldeans slain. What night!

The night of his wickedness. Festivity, and intemperance, and profaneness, generally go together. Job therefore, though he did not oppose the feasting of his sons in each other's houses, yet feared for them; and prayed and offered sacrifices, lest they should have sinned, and cursed God in their heart. But what dreadful excess of riot was here! "Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." Sentence against an evil work is not always speedily executed; for God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. But sin has frequently been instantly punished; as we see in the case of Lot's wife, and Gehazi, and Herod, and Ananias and Sapphira. And are there no instances of this now! What transgressor can be sure that he shall not die in the very act of iniquity! His breath is in his nostrils; there is but a step between him and death. A liar has dropped down with a lie on his lips. A swearer has called for damnation upon his soul, and the prayer has no sooner been offered than answered. The drunkard, in the midst of his intoxication, has been brought to soberness in a place where a drop of water cannot be found to cool his tongue. Derangement also may be, in effect, the same as sudden death. "He, that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and without remedy." What night!

The night of his visitation. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." The effect at first seems remarkable, as the import of the inscription was unknown. Yet what can be more alarming than strangeness and uncertainty! But why does he not suppose that the prodigy is favourable, containing an encomium, or a promise! Conscience forebodes the meaning. But Daniel explains it clearly; and admonishes him—but unavailingly. He had been warned before. This was the last address, and not designed for his salvation. Of what use, as to his moral state and disposition, were a few moments of confusion, and terror, and attempted resistance, or flight! And what better, for the purpose of repentance, are the hours or moments upon which many are suspending an attention to the things that belong to their peace! Death-bed alarms and prayers, and the exercises which attend them, are most likely, if useful at all, to benefit the living rather than the dead.

Well! where is he now? Where he has been ever since that night in which he was slain. What a length of duration! And yet after two thousand five hundred years he is not yet brought to trial! Ah! not the extinction of being, but the intermediate state, and afterwards the Judgment—this, this renders death so awful. O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we considered our latter end!

JANUARY 13.

"*And Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh: for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: for God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*"—Gen. xli. 51, 52.

There was nothing extraordinary in his thus giving them significant names. It was usual in those early ages to attach names to things, places, and persons, in order to mark any particular occurrence, and to be a memento of it. Thus, after the victory between Mizpeh and Shen, Samuel took a stone and called it "Ebenezer," saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. Thus, when God had appeared for him, Abraham called the mount "Jehovah Jireh;" the Lord will provide. Thus Pharaoh, upon the promotion of Joseph, called his name "Zaphnath-paaneah," the revealer of secrets. We read also that Moses had two sons; "the name of the one was Gershom," that is, a stranger there; "for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: and the name of the other was Eliezer," that is, my God is a help; "for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

But what others do from custom, a good man does from principle. In a common observance, he has a motive peculiar to himself. And therefore we see Joseph not only thus naming his children, but doing it "after a godly sort."

We learn from his conduct, first, that it is desirable to secure the remembrance of interesting events. "God requireth that which is past;" and our improvement requires it. We can only be affected and influenced by things as they are present in the mind—they are absent from it in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is temporary ignorance or unbelief. "By which," says the Apostle, "ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you." He therefore admonishes his hearers to give the more earnest heed to the things which they had heard, lest at any time they should let them slip. God calls upon His people "to remember what Balak consulted" against them: and to "remember all the way the Lord had led them in the wilderness." Let us therefore say, with Asaph, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; surely, I will remember His wonders of old." Was He once powerful, and is He now weak? once wise, and is He now ignorant? once true, and now faithless? once gracious, and now unkind? He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. How many of our failures, especially in thankfulness and confidence, are to be traced back to a bad memory!

Secondly, what a marvellous change is sometimes produced in the condition of God's people! What does Manasseh signify? "Forgetting." Why did Joseph give him this name? "For God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." That is, the hardships by which he had been exercised, the sufferings he had met with from his own brethren, and the anguish he had felt when torn so young from a home so endeared. Did he then banish all this from his memory? This would be perfectly inconsistent with his design in imposing the name. The meaning is, that his circumstances were so changed, that no trace of his former difficulties and distresses remained. We often say, in heaven we shall forget all our sorrows. Shall we then have no remembrance of the Hand that sustained us under them, and delivered us from them? Yes, but all sorrow and sighing will cease; and all tears will be wiped from our eyes. Few had ever been so tried as Joseph; and for a number of years the clouds returned after the rain, and fell heavier than before. At length he was not only delivered, but advanced. "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, see, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Thus every thing of his former degradation and misery was effaced as if it had never been—the change proclaiming that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Thirdly, the afflictions of the saints do not hinder their fruitfulness. What means Manasseh? "Fruitful." Why does Joseph impose this name upon him? "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." His dying father remarks this under a beautiful image: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." This includes, no doubt, a reference to his outward condition. Egypt had been the land, how truly! the land of his affliction: but he had succeeded in life beyond all example and expectation, and was made to flourish in all his estate. Here is surely an allusion to godliness, as well as to wealth, and honour, and offspring. What indeed in the eye of a good man is growing in every thing else, without growing in grace? What is it to abound in business, unless our soul prospers? What is it to be blessed with "the blessings of heaven above, the blessings of the deep that lieth under, the blessings of the breasts, and of the womb," if we are not blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?"

Paul prays for the Philippians that they may "be filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." Christian, what is the world to you but "the land of your affliction?" You have found it a vale of tears: but has it been a fruitful vale? Your trials need not prevent your fruitfulness; yea, they are designed to secure and promote it: and though they are not joyous but grievous, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. What have they done for us? It is sad that we should need them; but sadder still that we should lose the benefit of them. Can we say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted?"

Lastly, The hand of God is to be acknowledged in all our concerns, especially our mercies. Whether they are temporal or spiritual, they have the same source—every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. Joseph therefore says, *He* has done all things for me. If my condition has been changed, *He* changed it—"*God* hath made me to forget all my toil and my father's house." If I have been fruitful, in *Him* was my fruit found—"*God* hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." It is the office of faith to lead us to God, and to show us His agency where others only see instruments and second causes. It is the business of humility to teach and enable us to say, "Not unto us, O God, not unto us, but to Thy name be glory for the mercy and for the truth's sake"—Both furnish evidence that we are in a course of preparation for that world where "God is all in all."

JANUARY 14.

"*This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me: of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus: for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.*"—2 Tim. i. 15–18.

One of the most painful trials to which we are exposed in this vale of tears, is the failure of those friends, on whose professions of attachment we had placed dependence. But it is not a rare exercise. Witness the complaints of Job, and David, and especially Paul. Paul was additionally distressed to think that those who had left *him*, had not only forsaken a man and a friend, but a minister, and an apostle of Christ. Hence *their* desertion was nothing less than an abandonment of the faith of the Gospel. Defections in religion were foretold from the beginning. They early took place in the first churches. They frequently occur still. Many promise fair, and run well for a time; but are hindered. The blossoms are pleasing, but they are not certain pledges of fruit. Ministers can only rejoice in the day of the Lord Jesus that they have not laboured in vain—unless they rejoice with trembling. The end proves and crowns all.

The defection here was awfully general: it included "all they which were in Asia." Two of them, Phygellus and Hermogenes, the Apostle mentions by name; doubtless because they were leaders, and had been very instrumental in the revolt. This is all we know of these men: it would have been better for them, had we known less. "The name of the wicked shall rot." Only some of these sinners rot, like malefactors in irons and gibbets: they rot above ground, while others rot under it; known only by infamy; and suspended for warning and terror.

But "the memory of the just is blessed." How honourably is Onesiphorus brought forward! What an exception to the general apostacy! He is one against two—against many—against all in Asia. We are not to follow a multitude to do evil. Numbers can never turn evil into good, or truth into error. Community in sin is no excuse, and will be no preservation, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. Fellowship in suffering is no alleviation: it may be a bitter enhancement. There will not only be weeping, but gnashing of teeth, among those who accuse and execrate each other. This will be the case at the meeting of the seducer and the seduced; Voltaire and his pupils; the faithless minister and his deluded hearers. But to advance without support, in the face of opposition; to brave the torrent of example, and the influence of the crowd, concerned only to approve ourselves unto God, shows a divine nobleness and purity of principle and motive: and "them that honour me," says God, "I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

He therefore is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love which Onesiphorus had showed to his name, in the relief and assistance he had afforded his servant. Paul records here in the book of life, the tenderness of his liberality; his courage in owning him though a prisoner; his zealousness in searching him out in Rome; and the many things wherein he had, before this, ministered to him at Ephesus.—Was he then a man of leisure and wealth? It is probable he was not. The servants of Christ have seldom been much indebted to the rich. In a general way, the disposition for beneficence diminishes as the capacity increases; and the greater part of what is done for the Gospel and the poor, is done by people in common life. But he

had a public spirit: his heart was in his work: he did what he *could*—and whoever does what he *can*, will do, not only comparatively, but really, much. And was he a loser? Was Obed-edom injured by accommodating the ark? The ark, says Henry, is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment. None ever repented that they had done too much for the cause of the Redeemer. And none ever will, while the promise remains, "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

Thus Onesiphorus obtained a name and a place among the worthies in the Scripture. Wheresoever the Gospel is preached, that which he did, will be told as a memorial of him. Thousands bless him at this hour, for the part he acted. He lived in the affections of Paul; and constantly shared in his prayers. And was this a light thing, to be remembered by a man who had such power with God? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

In this way the Apostle expressed his thankfulness. He had a very humble, and, therefore, a very grateful disposition: and the favours shown him in his straits and distresses always made a deep impression upon him. Hence he prays for "the house" of his benefactor; that is, for his wife, children, relatives, servants, and outward estate. He prays also for his benefactor himself—"The Lord grant that *he* may find mercy of the Lord in that day." What! would such a man as *he*, with all his good works, need *mercy?* This would have seemed strange to some; but it would not be surprising to Onesiphorus himself. He knew that when he had done all, he was an unprofitable servant; and that if God entered into judgment with him, on the ground of his worthiness, he could not stand. It is the conviction of every man who is perfectly acquainted with the law, or the Gospel, or himself. He feels his need of mercy; mercy to the last; and, above all, mercy at the last. When he examines himself, he sees enough, not only in his sins, but even in his duties, to make him tremble and despair. But he looks for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

And he will find it. He will be spared; absolved; acknowledged; applauded; and glorified. What mercy! How free! How rich! And how will it be prized—in that day! If we find mercy then, we are made for ever. But wo to those who will be left to the justice of God, without a Mediator! If we have not fled for refuge, to lay hold on the *hope* set before us; and have not a *friend* in the Judge, we are undone for ever. If we find not mercy then, it can never be found afterwards.

JANUARY 15.

"*The gentleness of Christ.*"—2 Cor. x. 1.

Does the Apostle mean, by the gentleness of Christ, the gentleness He requires, or the gentleness He displayed? In fact, they are the same; not indeed in degree, but in quality. As "the precious ointment," poured upon the head of Aaron, ran down to the skirts of his garments, so Christians have an unction from the Holy One. The same mind which was in him, is in them; and so essential is this oneness, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But let us attend to this gentleness as it was personally exemplified in Himself.

According to the prophecies going before, there was nothing by which He was to be more distinguished than by this attribute or character. To mention a few instances. It was said of Him—"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee—having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass—and he shall speak peace unto the heathen." "He shall not cry nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth." "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. And if we go forward from prophecy to history, and see Him as He goes about doing good, what so constantly and strikingly shows itself as this lovely distinction? What was His emblem? A Lamb. How did the Holy Ghost descend upon Him? In the form of a dove. What was the angelical report of His religion? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." How does He employ the supernatural energies with which He was invested? It is true, He once cursed a fig-tree, and immediately it withered away. But it *was* a tree, and not a person; and a tree unowned; and growing by the way-side; and a barren one; and the malediction was intended to be an instructive emblem and warning. It is true also that He destroyed the herd of swine belonging to the Gadarenes. But this was only an animal sacrifice; and it was in love to their souls; and it was to bring their sin to remembrance; and to rebuke them for an unlawful traffic: and what was the loss of their swine, to the benefit He conferred upon them in the restoration of two of their neighbours and relations from the most wretched estate, to the

possession of reason and the enjoyment and usefulness of life? All the other miracles He performed were entirely and directly acts of kindness and tenderness. Thus He made the hungry multitude to sit down on the grass, and fed them—opened the eyes of a blind beggar—raised to life the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Where shall we end? Yea, He turned the water into wine at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, to perpetuate the innocent festivity of the scene, to save the new-married pair from mortification, and to crown them with honour.

It is true, He repeated again and again the exclamation, "Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" But they *were* hypocrites of the vilest complexion. Under a reputation for the strictest godliness they were full of extortion and iniquity. They sinned against knowledge and conviction. They really believed His miracles, yet ascribed them to the devil: made their devotion pander to their depravity; and with their public and long prayers devoured widows' houses. How could He avoid exposing and condemning these unprincipled wretches; and disabusing the common people of all confidence in such guides? What should we have thought of Him if He had not? What esteem could we have felt for him? Does mercy require the absence of righteousness? Is meekness connivance at crime? Does gentleness renounce all the exalted feelings of wisdom, rectitude, and dignity?

But observe Him with regard to others.—There was nothing censorious in his disposition; nothing distant and reserved in his manners. He was always easy of access, charitable in his constructions, mild in his rebukes, and tender in his invitations. How did He address the people at large? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." What said He to the transgressor, exposed by a number of accusers all guilty of the same crime, and wishing to have their fellow-sinner stoned?—"Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." How did He express Himself towards infants? "They brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them." See His conduct towards his friends. At the grave of Lazarus "Jesus wept." See his feelings in death towards his mother.—"When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." How gentle was He in all his dealings with his own disciples, bearing with their mistakes, apologizing for their infirmities, loving them unto the end, and blessing them in the very act of departure into heaven! And was He wanting in this temper towards his enemies? Did He not weep over the city whose inhabitants were going to imbrue their hands in his blood? Did He not heal the ear of the servant of his bitterest foe? What did He to those who came to apprehend him? He could have annihilated them with a frown, but He only impressed them with his glory, and caused them to go backward, and fall to the ground, and readily consent to the escape of his followers. He veiled the sun, and shook the earth, and rent the rocks, as he suffered; but he punished no one. Yea, he prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

He has the same heart now. Though He is passed into the heavens, He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His gentleness is now displayed in four things. First—in relieving our wants. How harshly are many treated, when they apply to their fellow-creatures for succour! and if they succeed, how ungraciously is the relief afforded. What a difference is there between bounty, and kindness: between giving, and the feeling of benevolence! Here females excel.—There is a tenderness and a delicacy in their doings which men can rarely reach or exemplify. So would it be with angels if they were incarnate, and lived among us. How gentle would be the manner of their beneficence! They now bear us up in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone: but it is so softly, that we are not suffered to be conscious of it. But the Lord of all! how He bows down his ear, and hearkens to all our tales of distress, and gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not—

Secondly—in teaching us. We usually think only of ability in a teacher; but temper and patience are equally necessary. Without gentleness, the pupil, especially if sensible of his defects, will feel either confusion or despondency. But who could ever bear with a scholar as Christ the great Teacher bears with us? With what long-sufferings does He endure our dulnesses and mistakes! What various expedients does He employ! How often does He repeat the lesson; year after year; line upon line; precept upon precept! Thirdly—in chastising us. He corrects us in measure. He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind. "He will not al

ways chide; neither will He keep His anger for ever. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." Fourthly—in employing us!

> "And will no heavy loads impose
> Beyond the strength that He bestows."

He "will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Let us not abuse his gentleness—nothing would be more vile, and odious, and provoking. But let us improve it by losing every thing like dread and slavishness in dealing with Him; by confiding in Him; and admiring Him; and following Him—till we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

JANUARY 16.

"My soul followeth hard after Thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."—Psalm lxiii. 8.

HERE are two acknowledgments, dissimilar in their expression; but the second relieves the first—and the first is as evidential of godliness as the second.

There are many that say, Who will show me any good? and follow hard after the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. But who says, "Where is God my maker, that giveth songs in the night?" Who "stirreth up himself to take hold of God?" Yet there always have been such, and the number now is increasing, whose souls follow hard after *Him*. But it may seem strange that this should have been the case with David. Few ever succeeded in life like him. He rose from great obscurity into splendour and affluence, and power; and was even seated upon a throne, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. What, some might be ready to say, what can the indulged mortal hope and wish for more? Yet he prays to be delivered from men of the world, who have their portion in this life; and exclaims, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." He was also a good man, and had enjoyed much of God. But this, instead contenting him, makes him long for more; and therefore he says, "to see thy power and thy glory, so as I *have* seen Thee in the sanctuary." We cannot pursue an unknown good, and we shall not pursue an unvalued one. But the knowledge of divine things, which results from the teaching of the Spirit, is always influential in the affections: experience gives a relish which can never be forgotten; enjoyment increases hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When we have tasted the first-fruits, nothing will satisfy but the whole vintage. When we have sipped of the streams, we *must* drink at the fountain-head. God therefore, God in Christ, God in covenant, the God of *all* grace, is the object of the believer's attraction and pursuit simply and supremely; and though heaven and earth are very comprehensive, and contain a thousand endearments, he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." "It is good for me to draw near to God."

But the *soul's* following, and following *hard* after God—what means this? Surely it intends much more than a languid, inert inclination; or "the desire of the slothful which killeth him, because his hands refuse to labour." It evinces an intenseness of concern that quickens and rouses the man into life and earnestness—that draws his very "soul" along with it—that reconciles him to every needful exertion and sacrifice, however trying—and urges him to persevere, whatever difficulties or discouragements he meets with in his course. And sometimes the distance is long—and the progress up hill—and the road rough—and the weather unfriendly—and enemies would thrust us back—and sometimes we lose sight of Him, and ask those whom we meet, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"—And when we spy him again, he seems to advance as we advance—and when we gain upon him and get nearer, he seems to look back and frown, and almost tells us to retire. The exercises and feelings of Christians in the divine life, will enable them to explain these allusions. Who among them all has not, like the Jews, been sometimes "discouraged because of the way?" Who has not resembled Barak's adherents, "Faint, yet pursuing?" Who has not frequently said, "My soul followeth hard after Thee?"

And who among them all has not had reason also to say—"Thy right hand upholdeth me?" For if God is before his people in one respect, he is with them in another: while He tries them by apparent neglect, he secretly sustains them; while He seems to forsake them, he really supports them, and renders their strength equal to their day. His right hand means the influence of his gracious power, employed to preserve and animate them to go forward in their arduous course, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, according to the promise, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Thus his right hand upholds them three ways. First—as to sin; lest they should fall by it. Secondly—as to suffering; lest they should sink under it. Thirdly—as to duty; lest they should decline from it.

Thus the believer's experience is now a kind of dawn, neither day nor night—a mixed estate of pains and pleasures, fears and hopes, struggles and triumphs. He resembles the

bush burning with fire, but not consumed: or the ship suffering from the winds and waves, but not sinking. He may be troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed: and in his lowest circumstances he can chide and encourage himself in the Lord his God—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of his countenance."

JANUARY 17.

"*And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen* RIGHTEOUS BEFORE ME IN THIS GENERATION."—Gen. vii. 1.

We have here a striking representation of the character of Noah's piety. It was distinguished by singularity and sincerity. If considered in reference to his fellow-creatures, it was singular; if in reference to the Supreme Being, it was sincere—"Righteous," says God, "*in this generation*?" and "righteous," says God, "*before me* in this generation."

"Righteous," says God, "*in this generation*,"—a generation universally depraved: "for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Noah therefore had none to accompany him, none to countenance him; but all opposed him. Never was there before, and never has there been since, one so singular in his religion as he—for he not only differed from his neighbours, but from all his nation; and not only from all his nation, but from all the earth. Here was the danger, and here was the triumph of his piety. The force of opinion and example when on the side of the multitude is inexpressible. When a man is *alone*, conscience and reason will sometimes speak; and he will form many a good purpose, especially when trouble lays hold of him, or he is laid on a bed of sickness. But when he goes forth again, and again enters the crowd, he becomes another man. His resolutions fail him; his impressions wear off; the course of this world lays hold of him, and the stream carries him down. Festus willing to do the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. Herod when he saw that it pleased the Jews, proceeded to take Peter also. Many of the Pharisees believed in Jesus, but feared to confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. And who has not been influenced by the smiles or frowns of his fellow-creatures to act against his judgment and convictions? Who has not been holden back from the performance of many things, which he knew to be duties, by the inquiry, What will my friends think of me? what will the world say of me?

It would be well for us, seriously to reflect in private; to search the Scriptures without prejudice or partiality; to lay down certain rules of conduct, and go forth in the strength of the Most High, and follow them wherever they lead us, through evil report, or good report, saying,

> "Careless, myself a dying man,
> Of dying men's esteem;
> Happy, O God, if Thou approve,
> Though all beside condemn."

"But I shall be singular." You will be singular; and while the world continues what it is, every Christian *must* be singular. Let any man, actuated by the spirit, and governed by the precepts of the Gospel, pass through the various walks of life, and whom will he resemble? The majority! What says the Divine command? "Follow not the multitude to do evil." "Be not conformed to this world." "Come out from among them, and be separate." "But I shall be singular." And suppose you are. In every thing else that is deemed excellent, persons wish to be singular. They would be singularly beautiful, singularly rich, singularly wise. But the righteous, in all these, is more excellent than his neighbour. Religion is always praiseworthy. To be religious among the religious is commendable; but it is far more so to be godly among the ungodly. What is innocence where there is no danger? or success where there is no contention? But to be surrounded with evil, and to be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord—this is the heroism of piety. This shows a knowledge of its infinite importance; a real love to its nature; a purity of motive; a nobleness of mind, asserting its own freedom, and daring to think and act for itself.

But his piety was as sincere as it was singular—"Righteous," says God, "*before me* in this generation." Much more is necessary to render us religious before God than before men: and frequently that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Human legislation is satisfied with actions; but the law of God is spiritual, and regards our principles as well as our practice. The Lord looketh to the heart. Hence we read of "pure and undefiled religion *before God and the Father*."

Bad goods require dark rooms; and as many articles of merchandise seem valuable till taken into the light, so there are many things which appear fair till they are set in the light of God's countenance. Before him the friendships we often profess are nothing but instances of selfishness; and the prayers and praises we engage in are only the forms of godliness. We may come to his house as his people come, and sit and hear his words, and commend the preacher, and with our mouth show much love, while He sees our hearts going after our covetousness. And how dread-

ful to think that He will hereafter develope all, and divulge all respecting us; and that what we have always been *before Him*, we shall be made to appear before an assembled world! Could many now be seen by their fellow-creatures as he sees them, they would blush to leave their dwelling—To what everlasting shame and contempt must they awake and arise at the last day!

It has been said, a man has four characters: one with his friends; another with his enemies; a third with himself; and a fourth with his God. The two last should agree; and they frequently do agree; and if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. We often confound hypocrisy and self-delusion. But hypocrisy has nothing to do with deceiving ourselves; it is only a deceiving of others. It is wearing a mask, instead of showing our own face: it is acting a part which does not belong to our character. This, we fear, is too common. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? But self-delusion is more rare, especially among those who live in the midst of the light of the Gospel. The decisions of the Scripture are so explicit, and the marks and evidences of real religion are so plain and many, that it is not an easy thing for a man to be ignorant or uncertain whether he loves God, or does not; whether he walks by faith or by sight; whether he minds earthly things or sets his affection on things above. Yet a man may be deceived, as well as be a deceiver, as to his spiritual state, and think himself to be something when he is nothing. Yea, it would seem that it is possible for persons to carry the delusion in their favour to the very door at which they will knock with confidence, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he will say, I know you not. Let it therefore be our solemn concern to inquire what character we sustain in the sight of God, on whose decision our destiny depends, and whose judgment is always according to truth. It was the honour of Zechariah and Elisabeth that they were both righteous before God—And of Noah God said, he is righteous *before me* in this generation. He was not perfect; but his piety bore the eye of God.

JANUARY 18.

"*And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark;* FOR THEE HAVE I SEEN *righteous before me in this generation.*"—Gen. vii. 1.

We have viewed the character of Noah's piety, let us now consider the *Divine observation* of it. "*Thee*," says God, "*have I seen* righteous before me in this generation." It means that He had discerned, noticed, remarked him. Men may suppose themselves unobserved; but they are not only God's creatures, but subjects. He is their moral governor; and inspects and examines them all. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are upon the ways of men, and He pondereth all their goings.

And what is his aim in the exploring of the human race? Is it to ascertain whether we are rich or poor, bond or free, learned or illiterate? These are distinctions of inferior importance; they will soon drop off from their possessors, and we shall enter eternity only under personal characters. The grand thing is, whether we are wise unto salvation; whether we are free indeed; whether we are rich towards God; whether we are men of the world, or heirs of the grace of life; whether we are wicked or righteous. And He is able to determine this, without the possibility of mistake. He is not far from any one of us. He needs not the aid of testimony to inform Him. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. He understands our thought afar off. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. Hence He knoweth them that are His; and sees them, however intermixed with others; and in his eye, they are as separate now, as they will be hereafter.

Here was only one holy man in the world of the ungodly: but the Lord saw that single grain of corn in a heap of chaff; and that particle of gold in a mass of dross: it was too precious to be overlooked or disregarded. And Noah continued to engage his attention. Having seen him, the Lord never lost sight of him. A prince cannot be acquainted with all the conditions of his subjects. A father cannot always have his children in view. But the Lord withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: their walls are continually before Him. He sees all their external difficulties, and all their inward anxieties. Do they wander? He telleth all their wanderings. Do they weep? He puts their tears into his bottle. Their desire is before Him, and their groaning is not hid from Him.

He is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love. If they speak one to another, He hearkens and hears, and it is recorded in the book of his remembrance. Much of their religion is private. But He seeth in secret. Much is defective. But where there is a willing mind, He accepts according to what a man has. Where the means of execution are wanting, He takes the purpose of the generous heart for the deed. Their wishes lie open to his view, and He judges of their services by them, and thus renders double unto them.

But when He says, "Thee have *I seen* righteous before me in this generation," He means to express not only discernment and

notice, but also approbation. "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright." He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in his mercy. They blush and weep over their duties; but He applauds them. The world often counts their life madness, and their end to be without honour; but the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.

Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, had laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought among the disobedient; but his work was with the Lord, and his judgment with his God. While the ark was preparing he met with nothing but ridicule and contempt. How often would they go in parties and insult him—"Well, old dotard, how come you on with your folly? So you are going to swim on dry land! Do you intend to make a sea as soon as you have done the ship? Where are your sails and rudder!"—Who knows not the force of cruel mockings?

But the work was the obedience of Faith: and while men scorned, the Lord admired. How delicious is the approbation of God! His smile; his voice, saying, Well done, good and faithful servant, is enough to disarm reproach and persecution, to sweeten all the bitternesses of life, and to commence heaven on earth.

JANUARY 19.

"*And the Lord said unto Noah,* COME THOU AND ALL THY HOUSE INTO THE ARK; *for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.*"—Gen. vii. 1.

WE have seen the character, and the observation of Noah's piety; and here we see *the privilege of it*—"Come thou and all thy house into the ark." It is needless to inquire how the invitation was conveyed, whether in a vision, or a dream, or by an impulse on the mind, or a voice in the air—Noah knew that it came from God. But the manner of expressing it is observable. He does not say, "Go thou and all thy house into the ark;" but "Come." As if God was there. And He was there, and would have his servants and his family with him, to be safe in the day of evil.

To understand the greatness of the privilege, you must recall the danger in which he now was, and endeavour to realize the scene. The time was arrived to fulfil the threatening. "The end of all flesh is come before me. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." All nature seems aghast at the frown of its Maker. As Noah steps into his welcome refuge, he looks, and sees every thing foreboding a gathering storm. The winds hurtle, the sky is covered with blackness; the windows of heaven are opened, the clouds pour down torrents, and the fountains of the great deep are broken up. The rivers swelling over their banks, and the seas invading the land, soon drive the inhabitants from the valleys and the plains. For awhile the hills and mountains afford them a retreat: and higher and higher they ascend up their sides. But no provision having been made, where will they find supplies of food? They look hungry at each other—and the weaker are slain and eaten with cannibal voracity. The devourers, according to their strength, survive one another. Their last hope are the trees, to whose branches they cling with despair, till, weakened or benumbed, they loosen their hold, and plunge into the flood. Then the stillness of death reigns over the universal grave. Many, before they perished, saw and heard the misery of thousands, and in the doom of their fellow-wretches realized their own. Many too perished in view of a place of safety they could not reach; and tortured with the thought that they had refused to enter while it was in their power, and so brought upon themselves destruction. Ah! how would they envy now the man they had derided!—And what were *his* feelings! His reflections! What were his apprehensions of the evil of sin, of the severity of God's justice, of the majesty of his power, of his goodness towards his people, of his caring for them, of his resources on their behalf! What pleasure would he feel; what thankfulness; what resolutions to love and serve Him!

The Apostle Peter teaches us the use we should make of this dispensation. If He "spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." The present is not entirely a state of retribution; here we walk by faith, and not by sight. Another period is approaching, and "then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not." Yet even now He puts a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites; and sometimes at least induces the exclamation even from unholy lips, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." And this interposition on their behalf is often spoken of in the Scriptures. He ordered a mark to be impressed on the forehead of those who mourned for the abominations that were done in the land, that the executioner when he approached Jerusalem might pass them by. John heard the angel crying with a loud voice to them who had power to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, "Hurt not the

earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." And says the Saviour to the church of Philadelphia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." "Come, my people," says God, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." If we distinguish ourselves for God, we shall be distinguished by him; or, as Henry expresses it, "If we keep ourselves pure in times of common iniquity, He will keep us secure in the times of common calamity." If we suffer with others, we shall not suffer like them. He can indemnify us with inward supports and consolations, and render it good for us to be afflicted. He can turn enemies into friends; and losses into gains. And if they suffer temporally, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus—and soon all tears will be wiped from their eyes. The Lord's people should therefore not be afraid of evil tidings. Their hearts should be fixed, trusting in the Lord.

But the privilege here was not personal only, but relative. He was allowed to bring "his *house*, and *all* his house, into the ark." It is good to belong to the godly. We share in many outward and spiritual advantages owing to the relation. If God's servants are blessings to others; if they are called the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in; if they keep off judgments, and bring down blessings upon the country in which they live; no wonder they are profitable to their own connexions. Abraham obtained a portion even for Ishmael. Thou hast spoken, says David, also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And when Solomon was threatened for his transgressions with the rending of ten tribes from the empire, he was assured it should not be done in his days, for the sake of his father. Parents should fear the Lord, for the good of their children. The best provision they can make for them is not a hoard of silver and gold, but entailing upon them the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it. It is true that real religion does not descend by inheritance. Yet the family of a good man has many spiritual advantages, derived from his instructions, example, and prayers. If they do not improve these, the sin is their own, and their punishment will be the greater. Ham was in the ark; but without repentance, though he experienced a deliverance from the flood, he perished for ever. "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We shall have reflected to little purpose upon all this unless this impression be left upon the mind, that we cannot serve God for nought. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." He who inhabiteth eternity, and has other worlds to show himself in; and he who is the possessor and governor of this, can never be at a loss to fulfil his own word, 'Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'

JANUARY 20.

"*The law is good if a man use it lawfully.*"
1 Tim. i. 8.

Does the goodness of the law then depend upon your conduct? By no means. It is good *in itself*, notwithstanding our ignorance or our wickedness. Yea, it is good, though it even increases our wickedness by irritation. And as a dam thrown across the river augments it by resistance, causing it to rise higher, to spread wider, and rush more impetuously; so "the strength of sin is the law." This is the case admitted by the Apostle: "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." Yet he concludes, "the law is holy, and just, and good"—It is founded in the nature of God and of man; and in our relations to himself and to each other. It requires nothing but what is reasonable, and conducive to our happiness—God himself could not have given any other law—this law can never be abolished or changed.

The Apostle means to say, that it is good or evil to *us*, according to the use we make of it.

What then is the unlawful use of the law? It is when we go to it as a covenant of works, seeking from it acceptance before God, and peace of conscience. It is wholly unable to answer such a purpose with regard to the fallen and the guilty. A law fulfilled indeed justifies; but a law broken can only condemn. It was never given for such a design. And such a use of it is therefore not only vain, but sinful: it is striving against God; it is opposing the plainest revelation of his will; it is robbing Him of his peculiar glory; it is frus-

trating his grace, and making Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. Yet this use of it is too natural, and it is with difficulty men can be drawn away from it, and made to *submit* themselves to the righteousness which is of God.

It is also improper to repair to it for another purpose. It can no more sanctify than justify. We may go to Sinai for the rule and the requisition; but we must go to Calvary for encouragement, motive, and strength. A sinless being can love God by seeing Him in his law, but a guilty one never can—He must first know that there is forgiveness with Him. Terror and even authority cannot produce *love*. Love is the only source of love; and without love there is no true obedience. The law therefore can do no more towards our renovation than our remission. Its threatenings and commands may induce an outward and constrained service, but will not bring us cordially to his feet, asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? They may make a hypocrite, or a slave; but says Cowper,

> "To see the law by Christ fulfill'd,
> And hear his pardoning voice,
> Changes the slave into a child,
> And duty into choice."

We use the law lawfully when,

First, It is made to convice us of sin. For sin is the transgression of the law; and therefore we must judge of the one by the other. As we perceive the crookedness of the workmanship by applying the straightness of the rule, so by the law, says the Apostle, is the knowledge of sin. I had not known sin, says he, but by the law: for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Secondly, when it urges us to the Saviour. Indeed nothing else can kill the self-righteous confidence which keeps man naturally alive to a vain hope, but an acquaintance with the spirituality of the law. This extends not only to the outward conduct, but the state of the heart, and our very motives. It demands nothing less than an obedience perfect in its principle, extent, and duration: for "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." How then can any flesh living be justified? Therefore, says the Apostle, "I, *through* the law, am dead to the law." And how *through* the law? But by the law's showing him his peril and danger? by its stripping him of all pretension to goodness and righteousness in himself? by its awakening his conscience with a sense of wrath, and driving him like the avenger of blood into the city of refuge? 'For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." While therefore we dislike legal preaching, there is a preaching of the law which is allowable and necessary, namely, when it is preached, not as a substitute for the Gospel, but to show its absolute importance, and to induce us to believe on Him that justifieth the ungodly, and whose faith is counted to Him for righteousness.

Thirdly, we use it lawfully when we regard it as a rule of life. Many vain things have been said upon this part of our subject. But it is a fact that the Apostle—and surely *he* was not wanting in evangelism—did refer to the moral law as the rule of life to believers. He enforces love, as "the fulfilling of the law," by which he unquestionably means the moral law, which says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And he calls upon children to obey their parents in the Lord, because "it is the first commandment" of the second table "with promise." And if this be not the rule of life, what is? Produce any other rule of sin or duty—If it be *less* perfect, it could not have come from Him who is the *same* yesterday, to-day, and for ever—If it be *more* perfect, then he gave a *defective* law before. But what rule can we conceive equal to this? It binds man to God and to all his fellow-creatures by love. And what can we think of those who view a deliverance from an obligation to love God with all our heart, and our neighbours as ourselves, as a *privilege?* A real Christian would regard such a state of exemption as the vilest bondage. He does not complain of the law, but of himself. He does not wish to bring down the law to his depravity, but he longs to rise into full conformity to its requirements. The more God does for him, the more does he feel himself bound to serve God. He also finds it every way useful to apply to this perfect rule. It humbles him by showing him his deficiencies. It makes him prayerful to obtain grace to do the will of God. It makes him long for heaven, where he will be completely happy, because he will be completely holy, and that law which is now put into his mind, and written in his heart, will have expelled every kind and degree of adverse principle, and filled him with all the fulness of God.

JANUARY 21.

"*As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike.*"—1 Sam. xxx. 24.

The Amalekites had burnt Ziklag, the place of David's residence, to the ground, and carried the people away captives. Having inquired of the Lord, David was encouraged to pursue after the marauders, and was assured that he should recover all they had taken. And so it fell out. But in the pursuit of two hundred men, being too faint to proceed, had been left at the brook Besor. These, when David returned re-possessed of his own property, and also laden with the riches of the enemy; these went forth to meet him

and David came near, and saluted them. But the men of Belial, who were with him, said, "Because they went not with us, we will not give them aught of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and children." Then, said David, "Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? *But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike:* and from that day forward, he made it a statute in Israel."

The equity of this statute is obvious. Let us pass to a higher order of things, and see how far David's conduct on this occasion is sanctioned by a greater than David.

All the Lord's followers are not alike circumstanced or employed. They differ in their conditions, offices, talents, opportunities, exertions, and trials. Some of them peculiarly require courage, others patience; some energy, others prudence. Some go down to the battle, others tarry with the stuff; some are called to act offensively, others defensively; some move in public, others in private life; the duty of some lies at a distance, others are keepers at home—

> "———Thousands at his bidding speed,
> And post o'er land and ocean, without rest—
> They also serve, who only stand and wait."

But this difference does not affect their acceptance and recompense. They shall part alike; that is, provided they are engaged in the Lord's service, and willing to do what is in their power. This was the case here. These men were as much disposed to go as their brethren; but they were unable; and when detained, they were not useless, but aided David in another department: they guarded the baggage while their comrades chased the foe. Why then should they have been forgotten or overlooked? Had it been otherwise; had these men refused to march or fight, and feigned excuses for their indolence, while their fellows toiled and bled; it would have been unrighteous for them to have fared alike in the spoil. In the battle of the Nile, one of the ships, in trying to take its ordered station, went aground, and could not be loosened in time to share in the heat of the action. This prevention, however, was purely accidental, and nothing could have been more trying to the feelings of the brave commander and his men: and who sees not that their claims were equal to those of their brethren, though their services were not? But reason could have urged nothing in their favour, had they, averse to the conflict, sailed away, or purposely have rendered their engagement impossible. And does not this apply to many professors of religion? The words of the Apostle, "where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not;" are very encouraging to some, but they are often abused by others. God never accepts a good inclination in the room of a good action, without inability: but the will is taken for the deed, where the deed cannot accompany the will. No excuse, therefore, is allowed for those who do not exert themselves according to their capacity and means. And He knows, unerringly, whether the impediments we plead are real or pretended. And how often does self-indulgence, or sloth, or cowardice, create difficulties and obstructions! "I cannot dig," says the unjust steward—why not? Had he no hands! or could he not procure a spade? Yes—but day labour was a harder kind of livelihood than a dash of the pen. Call upon a covetous hearer of the Gospel, with a case of distress; and he tells you, "I cannot give." What is the hinderance? A greedy desire to hoard whatever comes within his grasp. Others are crippled by profusion and excess in food, furniture, and dress. They live to the extent of their income, or beyond it, and so have nothing to spare for the poor, or for the cause of Christ.—But how are they disabled? Who requires them to live thus expensively? Surely not *He*, who says, "if any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." But, where the desire is to the Lord, He estimates the services of his people, not by what they do, but what they would do, were they not prevented. David wished to build a house for His name, but was forbidden; yet the Lord told him, it was well that it was in his heart, and promised to build *him* an house.

Is this a curious or a useless speculation? It is adapted to keep us from pride and disdain. Let us not undervalue others because they have not our distinctions or advantages while they are doing service in other ways. God smiles upon them, and we should respect them. Let not the eye say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Even those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. Hence Paul's caution to every man, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or

he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

It should also keep us from leaving our own stations, and intruding into places for which we are not designed. The temptation is often usefulness; but if we are unprofitable, the fault is not in our condition, but in our principles and dispositions. We may serve our generation, and have the testimony that we please God, in whatever state his providence places us. Let every man, therefore, abide in the calling in which he is called of God.

And in the same way it should silence the discontent or discouragement that often arises from the obscurity and limitation of our circumstances. Why do we murmur or despond because we have not the situations and resources which others command? The Lord who withholds them, looketh at the heart. "If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" What said He of Mary? "She hath done what she could." Many put into the treasury; and the rich gave largely; but the poor widow who gave only two mites, gave more than they all. The man who occupied with five talents, heard the same sentence as the man who had improved his ten—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant." And the man who was cast into outer darkness would have had the same commendation had he not been negligent: he was rejected, not because he had only one talent, but because he hid it in a napkin. It is well to see the rich generous, and humble, and thankful; but the same degree of grace may appear equally in the poor when they refuse to steal, and take not God's name in vain. The man who knows how to be abased is as divinely instructed as he who knows how to abound. Some go to the house of God with the multitude to keep holy day: others are detained by accident, sickness, or infirmity; but "in their hearts are the ways of them;" and therefore they shall see his power and glory alone, as others see him in the sanctuary. One has leisure to go forth on a week day evening to hear the preaching of the word; another abides by the stuff. That female edifies the public with her pen; this is engrossed in rearing her infant family, and performing the most important duties of life without notice—they are equally respectable and valuable in their places, and shall part alike. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

Moral greatness does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things with a great mind; that is, with a desire to please and glorify God. It therefore lies open equally to all. The servant may be as great in the sight of the Lord as his master. In a word, the excellency of individuals depends not upon the eminence of their station, or the splendour of their calling, but in the fidelity and zeal with which they answer to their claims and duties; just as the perfection of an actor appears, not in the kind of character he represents, but in the manner in which he performs it.—

"Glory and shame from no conditions rise;
Act well your part,—there all the honour lies."

JANUARY 22.

"*Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.*" Gen. xxxv. 8.

She was one of his mother's servants. When Rebekah married, she took Deborah along with her. She had therefore attended Jacob in his infancy; and after his mother's death he seems to have sent for her, and she came and lived with him, and rendered herself useful to his own children. She must now have been very aged. In those earlier days domestics retained their relation to their masters and mistresses much longer than they now do: unless they married; and sometimes, even then, they commonly died in the families in which they lived. Now, the connexion is frequently but for the year or month. "Ah," it is said, "servants are not now what they were formerly." We believe it; but the principal reason perhaps is, because their masters and mistresses are not the same. Corruption, like every other stream, does not run upward, but downward. Fashions descend from the high to the low: and morals do the same. From the state of the hall, we may generally ascertain the previous state of the parlour.

Old domestics, who have been faithful and useful in their generation, should not be disregarded as hirelings who have filled their day, but be treated as humble relations—"Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not."

No mention is made of Rebekah's dissolution or interment; but we are informed of the death and burial of her nurse. As all could not have a place in his word, the pleasure of God is seen in the distinguished notice taken of some individuals above others. Yet he has not acted arbitrarily in this case. He bestows his favours freely; but honour is dispensed according to rule, and that rule he has himself laid down—"Them that honour me, I will honour." And this may be done in any station, or condition of life. And the

Lord is no respecter of persons. He seeth not as man seeth; and often chooses things that are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh may glory in his presence.

The weeping here was so great that it gave a name to the place. Nothing could more strongly show the worth of this old female, and the place she held in the esteem and affection of the whole family. Every tear that dropped from every eye said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There are some who draw forth no blessing while they live, or tears when they die—a dry funeral is a hateful sight.

She was buried upon the spot, under "the oak of weeping." Burying-places are of natural, not of religious consideration. Where the tree falleth, it may lie. But let us not fail to observe how little we know of the circumstances in which we may be called to die—whether among careless strangers or sobbing friends, whether at home or abroad, whether in the chamber or on the road. Therefore says Wisdom, "Be ye *always* ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man may come. We can ascertain where we began life, but there is only one Being who can tell where we shall end it. But we may well leave it to our Heavenly Father to choose the lap of earth on which we shall repose. Wherever it may be, it will be alike safe and comfortable, if we fall asleep in Jesus.

JANUARY 23.

"*Clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*" Rev. i. 13.

The dress was sacerdotal; and our Lord's appearance in this attire was to remind John that He was the High Priest of our profession. This is one of the three grand offices He sustains and executes in the economy of our salvation—He who is the prophet that was to arise like unto Moses, and the King in Zion, is also an High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. And we make no scruple to say, that the first and second of these offices derive their efficacy and even their existence from the third.

The High Priest under the law was a very remarkable and important character. He was the medium of all intercourse between God and the people. Thus he was a striking emblem of the Lord Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant. But in tracing the resemblance we shall pass by his personal qualities, the mode of his consecration, the oil that was poured upon his head, and his vesture to the skirt of which were attached the golden bell and pomegranate—in all of which truth may find some analogy and fancy more: and notice only the three actions he had to perform. These were,

First, expiation. He offered not only gifts but sacrifices: and we know the design; it was to atone for the sins of the people. The slaughter of the victims showed at once the penalty of sin, and the way of deliverance from it—life for life—for without shedding of blood there is no remission. Herein the High Priest typified the Saviour: but see how the former is surpassed by the latter! The one offered for his own sins as well as for those of the people: the other was harmless, holy, undefiled, separate from sinners. The one repeated his sacrifices often, because they could not make the comers thereunto perfect; the other, by the one offering up of Himself, perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The one made atonement only for the congregation of the children of Israel; the other taketh away the sin of the world.

Secondly, intercession. We know not whether the High Priest used any words; but what he did, spake loud enough. For after slaying the victim, he took the blood in a bason, and, wearing the names of the tribes of Israel on his breast, he entered into the holiest of all, and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burnt incense; while He who sat between the cherubim smelled the sweet savour. And thus Jesus, after bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and obtaining eternal redemption for us, entered into heaven itself, with his own blood, there to appear in the presence of God for us, presenting and pleading his sacrifice, and founding on his satisfaction his claims in favour of his people. "Wherefore He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins."

Thirdly, benediction. While he was burning incense within, the whole multitude of people were praying without, and did not depart till he came forth and pronounced the blessing. The very words he used are recorded: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This language was more than a mere wish on the part of the High Priest; it was the blessing of Him whom they had offended, and was nothing less than an acknowledgment that God was pacified towards them, that they were in favour with Him, and might go away joyful and glad of heart. So his Church had not long to wait, when they saw Him enter within the vail in his accession to glory, before he came forth in the effusion of his Holy Spirit, and commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

in the preaching of the gospel, which assures us that we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, that we are accepted in the Beloved, and shall be satisfied early with his favour. "Happy art thou, O Israel." "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

JANUARY 24.

"*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight.*" Psalm xix. 14.

All human beings should have a governing aim to influence and regulate them. And all have such an aim: but all have not a proper one. All wish to please: but we may divide them into three classes. Some please *themselves*. Whoever is offended, they must be indulged. Whatever be the claims of others, they will have their own way, and humour. Some strive to please *men*. And this is not in all cases improper. A condescending and obliging behaviour is lovely; and, therefore, enjoined. "Let every one of us please his neighbour." But it must be "for his good to edification;" and in things lawful; otherwise, "if I seek to please men, I shall not be the servant of Christ." Some endeavour to please *God*. These are, indeed, comparatively few; but we hope their number is increasing. Such were Paul and his companions: "We labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him." And such was David: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight."

By a figure of speech, all authors frequently use a part for the whole. David wishes to dedicate to God all his powers and actions; and to walk before Him in all his commandments and ordinances, blameless. But if we take the expression as it is, we see how he extends his pious solicitude. A natural man may regard his conduct, especially as it falls under the observation of his fellow-creatures. But does he make conscience of his *speech?* Does he make conscience of his *thoughts?* David's care reaches to the words of his mouth, and the meditations of his heart; and he prays that both may be acceptable in God's sight.

The prayer shows his humility. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. A faithful examination of our holiest things will destroy all confidence in them, and prove that they need forgiveness, rather than deserve recompense. "My performances are so poor, so imperfect, so unworthy, that it must be an act of grace in Thee to regard them. Deign, O Lord, to smile upon them. View them in the Son of thy love; and for His sake forgive the evil and accep the good—

> "I cast them at Thy feet: my only plea
> Is what it was, dependence upon Thee."

The prayer shows his affection. All must acknowledge the importance of loving God. But what is the best evidence of it? "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." And the Christian delights in his law. It is enough for him to know what He forbids, or what He enjoins. This, says he, will please Him; therefore I will pursue it. This will offend Him; therefore I will forbear. David was anxious that not a word or a thought should displease his God.

The prayer shows a consciousness of duty. We are all under an indispensable obligation to please God, both on the ground of gratitude and justice. Who called us into being? Who has fed us all our life long? Who sought us when lost, and ransomed us from death and hell? We are not our own? For we are bought with a price. He is our father, our master, our king. And without a concern to please Him, can we be good children, good servants, good subjects? There may be a time when an obligation to please an earthly superior may cease to be binding upon us. He may require of us what is unreasonable and unrighteous. But God's perfect will demands nothing but what is wise, and holy, and just, and good.

The prayer shows a regard to self-interest. David was not mercenary; but he knew he could not serve God for nought. In serving God we more effectually serve our own welfare: and as God himself has placed the advantage before us in the Scripture not only as a truth, but as a motive, it cannot be improper to regard it. Many will entreat the favour of the prince, and every one is a friend to him that giveth gifts. But if we were sure of gaining his approbation—than which nothing is more uncertain—yet what is it when obtained? But if we study to please God, success is not only sure, but glorious. The friendship of the mightiest monarch can do very little for us; our greatest exigencies lie far beyond the reach of human aid. But God can supply all our need. He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we are able to ask or think.

It would be endless to specify all the benefits attached to a pleasing God. Is preservation from sin a blessing? "Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her." There is nothing too vile for us to fall into if we provoke our Defender to withdraw from us. Is safety and concord a blessing? "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Is the answer to prayer a blessing? "And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep his commandments, and do those

things that are pleasing in his sight." Is a removal to heaven desirable! "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." He went indeed in a chariot of fire; but an apoplexy, an accident, a dropsy, a fever will not be amiss, that takes us from a vale of tears into the joy of our Lord.

JANUARY 25.

"*We are the Lord's.*"—Rom. xiv. 8.

By the Lord here we are to understand the Lord Jesus: witness the words immediately following: "For to this end *Christ* both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

Now if we examine, we shall find that He has every kind of claim and right to us.

He has a right, derived from his creating power. If "all things were made by Him," He made us, and not we ourselves. In consequence of this, he has a property in us, not only such as no man can have in a fellow-creature, but such as even no father has in his own children. They are his in a subordinate and limited degree; but we are the Lord's absolutely and entirely. He brought us out of nothing; framed our bodies; covered us with skin and flesh; fenced us with bones and sinews; and formed our spirits within us. Suppose we were to return to him all that we received from him—what would be left as our own!

He has a right, derived from his providential care. He has not only given us life and favour, but his visitation hath preserved our spirits. Why died we not from the womb? Who sustained us when we hung on our mother's breast? Whose mercies have been new every morning? Who has given his beloved sleep? Who has inspired our connexions with all the tenderness they ever expressed towards us? Whose are we but *His*, in whom we live, move, and have our being? How vile and mean to enjoy the light of his sun—to breathe his air—to eat constantly at his table—to be clothed from his wardrobe—and not own and acknowledge our obligations to Him!

He has a right, derived from his redeeming mercy. We are not our own, but bought with a price, and He paid it. To feel the force of this claim, it will be necessary for us to weigh three things. First, the mighty and dreadful evils from which he has delivered us; sin, the power of darkness, the present evil world, death, and the wrath to come. Secondly, the state to which He has advanced us; its blessedness, its glory, its safety, its duration, its immensity. Even the beginnings of it here, its earnests and foretastes, are indescribable and inconceivable—even now the joy is unspeakable and full of glory; and the peace passeth all understanding. Thirdly, the way, the infinitely expensive way in which he has thus ransomed us. All comes free to us; but what did it cost Him! Owing to our slight views of the evil of sin and the holiness of God, we are very little struck with the greatness of redemption and the difficulties attending it. It was easy to destroy man; but to restore him, in a way that should magnify the law which had been broken, and display God as the just, as well as the justifier, was a work to which the Lord Jesus only was adequate—and what does it require even of him? Not a mere volition—not a mere exertion, as when he delivered the Jews from Egypt, and spake the world into being. He must assume flesh and blood. He dwelt among us. For thirty-three years he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Let us go over his history; let us survey his sufferings; let us meditate on his agony in the garden; his shame on the cross; his abasement in the lowest parts of the earth: and all this for enemies; and all not only without our desert, but without our desire—till we feel we are drawn, and bound with the cords of a man and the bands of love—a love that passeth knowledge. Hence

He has a right, derived not only from what he has done, but from what we have done; a right derived from our dedication. If Christians, we have ratified his claims, and have actually surrendered ourselves to him, renouncing every other owner, and saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me. Other Lords beside Thee have had dominion over me; but henceforth by Thee only will I make mention of thy name." Thus the Corinthians "gave their ownselves unto the Lord." In this surrender, the main thing is the heart; for if this be given, nothing will be withholden. This therefore is the Lord's demand: "My son, give me thine heart." And perhaps some can remember the particular time when this surrender was first effectually made. Perhaps they had been pressed by an affliction that had threatened their frame, or laid bare their earthly hopes. Perhaps a friend had urged—perhaps a sermon. But the surrender was made—"Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee, with all I have, and all I am. My understanding shall be Thine, to know Thee; my will, to choose Thee; my conscience, to fear Thee—

> "If there be passions in my soul,
> And passions, Lord, there be,
> I yield them all to thy control,
> My Jesus, all to Thee—"

My tongue shall show forth thy praise. My time, my property, my influence, shall all be employed for Thee. And this dedication you have often renewed since—in the hour of retirement—in the field of meditation—in

the house of prayer—at the table of the Lord—

And having opened your mouth unto the Lord, you cannot go back. Nor do you wish it. To whom could you go? He hath the words of eternal life—It is your highest privilege to belong to Him. If you are the Lord's, He will take care of you. He will provide for you. He will guide you with his counsel, and afterward receive you to glory—"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

JANUARY 26.

"*They have forsaken the right way.*"
2 Peter ii. 15.

We shall leave the persons of whom the Apostle here speaks, and call upon you to think of yourselves. Religion is, very properly, held forth by the "right way;" and we have accordingly six admonitions to bring forward concerning it.

First—inquire what this right way is. If you err here, the labour of advancing will be in vain; your progress will only lead you astray, and terminate in disappointment, regret, and woe. And Solomon tells us "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." How surprising and terrible to fall from the expectation of heaven into the depths of hell! Yet this will be the case of some, yea many, who will carry their confidence to the very door, "saying, Lord, Lord, open to us;" "and He shall answer and say unto them, I know ye not whence ye are." In a case of so much importance, where there is reflection, there can be no satisfaction of mind without certainty; and certainty is attainable. Go forth by the footsteps of the flock. Search the Scriptures, and search them for the purpose they were given to accomplish, "that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that, believing, we might have life through his Name." If you are anxious to know how you may come before the Lord, and what you must do to be saved, you will find the Prophets and Apostles all ready to show unto you the way of salvation. Especially pray to the Father of lights, and plead the promise: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Thus you will be taught of the Lord; his Spirit shall lead you into all truth; and as a wayfaring man, though a fool, you shall not err therein.

Secondly—enter it, and walk therein. There is a form of knowledge as well as of godliness; and it is lamentable to think how many there are who rest in it. They are familiar with every thing the preacher advances, and admit readily the truth of it into their judgment; but while they hear his words, they do them not. They acknowledge themselves to be sinners, but never cry for mercy. They believe in the divinity, atonement, and righteousness of the Saviour, and that there is salvation in none other; but do not come to Him that they might have life. But "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The knowledge of a remedy will never cure you without an application of it. Your knowledge of a way leading to a place will never bring you there, unless you set off, and hold on till you reach it. Yea, your acquaintance with divine truth, if it has no influence over you, will be worse than nothing: "for to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." "And that servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Therefore, saith the Lord, not only "stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way;" but "walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

Thirdly—when you are in it, turn not aside to the right hand or to the left. There are mistakes and miscarriages of an opposite description; and we must not suppose that in going from one side we are in no danger from the other. All extremes are dangerous; and truth and duty lie in the middle. So Bunyan taught: representing a lion on each side of the road, but restrained by their chain from approaching the middle—the only safe passage was between. And Inspiration long before had said, "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Courage lies between rashness and dread; and patience between despising the chastening of the Lord and fainting when we are rebuked of him. Parents are not foolishly to indulge their children, neither are they to provoke them to wrath, lest they should be discouraged. We may not know what manner of spirit we are of; and be either too candid or too severe. Did not Doddridge err in the former, and Toplady in the latter? Some carry the tenderness of conscience into weakness; and some its allowances into licentiousness. Some are too exclusively for privilege; and others for duty: but faith and works have both their claims in the Gospel; and from the Saviour's side came there out blood and water.

Fourthly—get as many as you can to accompany you. How can you bear to see the destruction of your kindred? Begin therefore with your relations, as Moses addressed Hobah: "We are journeying unto the place of

which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." But extend your concern, and, as you have opportunity, say to all, and let your temper and life enforce the invitation: "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Many in families and neighbourhoods have begun alone—for we are not to wait for others; but after a while their prayers and endeavours have been crowned with success; and those who neglected, or even opposed them before, have taken sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company with them. And to be the instrument of winning one soul! "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!"

Fifthly—go on your way rejoicing. So did the eunuch after Philip had preached unto him Jesus. And what source of joy had he, which is not open to you? You may indeed reckon upon difficulties and trials; but the Lord of the way hath said, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Finally—think much of the end; "the end of your faith;" "the end, everlasting life." Who can describe or conceive the blessedness and the glory that await you? And the attainment is sure and near! A few more paces, and your Father's house will appear in view—

> "Soon shall you hear him say,
> Ye blessed children, come:
> Soon will he call you hence away,
> And take his pilgrims home."

JANUARY 27.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."—1 John iv. 4.

How desirable was it to inform them of their relation to God—"Ye are *of God*, little children." So in a sense are all: for he made us, and not we ourselves. As men, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. He clothed us with skin and flesh, and fenced us with bones and sinews: and he not only framed our bodies, but formed our spirits within us. But there is something more peculiar in the relation here spoken of. Believers are of God, not only as they are the creatures of his power and providence, but as they are the subjects of his grace. They are of him, not only by formation, but renovation also. This people, says he, have I formed for myself. They are his workmanship. They are new creatures: they have a new being, a new heart, a new life; all things are become new—and in all this they are of God—"Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

How encouraging was it to announce their victory—"and ye *have overcome* them." They had not only resisted and withstood, but had vanquished. How was this? Were their foes all slain? Had they taken off the helmet and sheathed the sword? Had they left the field, and were they now returning home with songs of triumph? Do not Christians find the spiritual life a warfare to the last! And as long as they continue here, are they not armed? Are they not engaged? And yet John speaks as if the warfare were achieved. The reason is, because it *is* partially accomplished. They have fought and gained many a battle; and have said, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." And the remainder of the conquest is *sure*. Now where there is certainty, the future is spoken of in the Scripture as if it were past. Thus Isaiah, ages before the incarnation of the Messiah, said, "Unto us a Child *is* born; unto us a Son *is* given!" Well, therefore, may the believer say, "Thanks be unto God, who *giveth* us the victory:" "Yea, *in* all these things, we *are* more than conquerors."

How wise was it to remind them of the cause of their success—"Because *greater* is *He* that is in you, than *he* that is in the world." It was not owing to themselves—*they* were not greater—yea, they were nothing to their enemies. But if they were nothing to their enemies, their enemies were nothing to their Friend and Keeper. The chief of them, the prince of this world, the god of this world, is nothing to the Lord of all, who is *for* them, and *nigh* unto them, and in them, in all that they call upon him for—If the one is mighty, the other is Almighty. He is therefore not only greater, but infinitely greater: and not only greater in himself, but greater in his agency—greater in his residence—greater in his subjects. He produces in them principles more powerful than any of the principles which their enemies would maintain, though *they* have the advantage of an earlier being, and derive aid from every thing around us. How else would they ever have *obtained* possession of the heart? "When a strong man, armed, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." And how else could they *retain* the possession, when every effort will be made by the mortified foe to recover his former sway? But truth is stronger than error: grace is above nature; and the Spirit of the living God, that dwelleth in his people, can easily subdue the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Let this regulate your gratitude. You have seen many fall, who once seemed much more likely to stand in the evil day than your-

selves—but here you are: and though, from the time you commenced your religious course, you have been constantly opposed by all the powers of darkness, your heart has not turned back, neither have your steps declined from his ways. To whose Name are you to give glory? You have often said, "I shall one day perish:" and you would have perished long ago, had you been left to yourself—But here is the secret—"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."

The same truth that accounts for your standing as to the past, will show what you have to rely upon as to the future. If the one demands your praise, the other justifies your confidence. When you look forward, you feel your need of strong consolation; and there is enough to inspire it. Renounce self-dependence; but be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Look to his grace for your all-sufficiency; and you shall never be confounded. Every thing else may, yea, must give way—But "he that is born of God, overcometh the world." "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet, shortly."

JANUARY 28.

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."—Rev. viii. 3, 4.

The ablest expositors consider this angel as the Lord Jesus. There were two altars attached to the Jewish temple. But the altar here spoken of was not the altar of burnt-offering which stood in the inner court, but the altar which stood in the holy of holies, called the golden altar; and at which the high priest, after he had sacrificed the victim, and sprinkled the blood, burnt incense, while the people were praying without. The censer was a small chafing-dish, filled with burning coals, upon which the high priest threw the rich perfume, whose fragrance then ascended in a cloud of odour, of a sweet smell, to God, who sat above upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubim. This was typical of the High Priest of our profession, who, having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, entered into the holy place, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood; not to burn incense, but to make intercession for his people, while they are praying in this lower world. Four things are observable.

First, his people are saints. So they are called, not only here, but throughout the Scripture. The term is not confined to a few official and extraordinary characters. We affix the title to the immediate disciples of the Lord Jesus; and say, Saint Matthew and Saint John: but the Apostle inscribes several of his Epistles "to the Saints that are in Christ Jesus"—that is, the whole body of the Church. The name is therefore applicable to all real Christians. They are called to be Saints; called unto holiness; and holiness is not only the design, but the tendency of all their principles and privileges, when properly understood. They are not saints by nature, but are made so by grace. And how does grace accomplish this work? It makes them saints, not by imputed holiness—there is no such phrase in the Bible, nor in the vocabulary of common sense. Nor by imputed righteousness—this makes them *righteous*, and justifies them before God. But they are made *holy* by the operation of the Spirit of grace and truth. In consequence of which, there is a renovation of their nature, and a consecration of all they are, and all they have, to the service and glory of God.

Secondly, the saints are all men of prayer. "The prayer of *all* saints"—not of *some*, but of *all*. They are the generation of them that seek him. For this shall every one that is godly call upon him. The Spirit of grace is always the spirit of supplication; and praying is as essential to the divine life, as breathing to the natural. Vain therefore is every pretension to religion, without a devotional temper. The wicked restrain prayer before God. The hypocrite will not always call upon him. The formalist, who does not decline it, cries, What a weariness it is to serve him! How is it with us? Do we live without God? Do we only pray when urged by fear or affliction? Do we feel the duty a drudgery rather than a privilege? *All* saints pray, in the temple, in the family, alone, habitually, as long as they live: and find it good to draw near to God.

Thirdly, many imperfections attend their services. Hence we read of "much incense offered *with* the prayers of all saints." In this book mention is often made of the worship of angels, but we do not read of a mediator for them; nor of incense being presented with their devotion. Nor was this the case with the services of Adam and Eve in Paradise. But we are fallen creatures. We are vile, what shall we answer him? We pollute every thing we touch. Our Sabbaths would condemn us, as well as our week-days, were we to be tried by them. Our good works deserve rejection, rather than reward. Our repenting needs repentance; and our weeping, tears. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; and the innumerable sins of our holy things constrain us to cry, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord·

for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." Can this be prayer? Is this worshipping him who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth? What wandering of thought! What distraction of mind! What coldness of affection! What a want of fervency and faith!—How can I offer this to the only wise and holy God! If I see so much that is defective and defiled in my services, and am so dissatisfied with them—how must they be viewed and regarded by him who charges his angels with folly! in whose sight the very heavens are not clean? who sees more depravity in our duties than we see in our sins!—But,

Fourthly, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; and relief is to be found in the Mediator between God and man. "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." We inquire not whether this intercession be vocal—we are not informed whether the high priest said any thing when he officiated at the golden altar. But we know that his intercession is real; and founded on his suffering and death, which were an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. Hence, his blood speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. It cries not for revenge, but pardon. "Be merciful to their unrighteousnesses—I have borne their grief, and carried their sorrow. I have magnified the law; and redeemed them from the curse—Keep, through thine own Name, those whom thou hast given me. Sanctify them through thy truth. Let them be with me where I am, to behold my glory." These are *his* pleadings for us, who is infinitely worthy. And we are assured of the result—The Father heareth him always.

This same shall comfort us. He is the consolation of Israel. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. If we love him, we shall not, we cannot abuse this encouragement: but let it give us boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Let us unite hope with humility; and rejoicing in Christ Jesus, with having no confidence in the flesh. And when we think of passing through the valley of the shadow of death, to enter the immediate presence of the Eternal, let us say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of his righteousness only."

JANUARY 29.

"*He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.*"—Psalm cv. 14, 15.

He did this to the patriarchs. He did it when they were but few in number, yea very few, and strangers in the land: and when they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people: and so seemed to invite hostility and injury from the powerful and unprincipled. He did it sometimes in dreams and visions, and sometimes in words and deeds: as we see in the rebuke of Pharaoh with regard to Abraham when in Egypt; and of Abimelech with regard to Isaac in Gerar. Also when by the destruction of the Shechemites Jacob's sons had rendered him odious to all the surrounding clans: yet, when he journeyed, "the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after them." "He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

Here we see that God's servants are dearer to him than kings. The world knoweth them not. They are often poor and afflicted. And therefore those who judge after outward appearance make little account of them. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" Yet of such the world is not worthy. In their state and character they are more excellent than their neighbours, wherever they may be placed, or however they may be endowed. To them the Lord looks; in them he takes pleasure. "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

We learn also that his servants are never without a divine Guardian. When first they flee to him for refuge, he encourages them as David did Ahimelech escaped from the fury of Saul: "Abide thou with me; fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." They may sometimes lose dependencies; they may feel helpless and friendless; they may be hated and opposed: but there is no enchantment against Jacob; no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. Are they travellers? The Lord is their keeper, the Lord is their shade upon their right hand. He shall preserve them from all evil. Are they useful? They are immortal till their work is done. Have they reached the days of privation, and infirmity, and depression? He will not cast them off in the time of old age; but will bear and carry them even to gray hairs. He will *never* leave them nor forsake them—

> "Though I should walk through death's dark shade,
> My Shepherd's with me *there!*"

Once more. All creatures are under the Lord's control; and when he does not renew them, he can restrain. The noblest agency of God is his spiritual agency: and nothing can be more delightful than to contemplate his gracious dominion over the souls of men;

opening their understandings, enthroning himself in their hearts, changing their views and feelings, and making them new creatures. Are we the subjects of *this* agency? But distinguishable from this, there is another agency of God, and which we may call providential. Solomon alludes to it when he says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." The husbandman can form a new channel for the water, and the stream shall flow as freely as before, and retain the same qualities. Esau left home armed, and resolved to kill Jacob; but the Lord softened, though he did not sanctify his heart, so that when he met him he fell upon his neck and kissed him: for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. The spirit of Cyrus, though a heathen, was stirred up to favour Israel, and to let go the Lord's captives, not only without ransom, but even enriched for their journey. At the three festivals of the Jews, all the males were to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem. Thus the country seemed drained of its defence; and surrounded as the people were with enemies ready to seize every advantage against them, they might be tempted to say, "What will become, in our absence, of our fields, and vineyards, and houses, and wives, and children?" But says God, who has all hearts as well as all events at his disposal, "I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year."

If I have any thing to do with my fellow-creatures, let me commit my way unto the Lord. Let me follow my convictions wherever they lead me. If I am reviled, let me not revile again, but commit myself to Him that judgeth righteously. Who is he that will harm us, if we are followers of that which is good? If God be for us, who can be against us?

JANUARY 30.

"*Moreover He called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him: even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance.*"—Psalm cv. 16—21.

God promised the patriarchs much more than he performed for them here. The relation into which he entered with them necessarily involved a future state; yet he was far from disregarding them in this life. The former words show us how he preserved them in danger: when they were very few, and strangers in the land of Canaan: "When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; he suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." And the words before us prove how he supplied them in distress.

They suffered from one of the sorest judgments that can ever befall humanity. The whole staff of bread was broken, and famine was sore in the land, and prevailed in all the neighbouring countries, and continued seven years. But *the Lord called for it.* The expression not only reminds us that evil cometh from the Lord as well as good, but shows us the sovereignty and ease with which he brings it. All calamities are at his disposal; and if He speaks, they must obey him. Practical infidelity is often connected with nominal faith. People talk nationally of inexhaustible resources, of invincible armies and navies; but there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. If he calls for an enemy, his way will be made prosperous; every thing will favour him. If He calls for continued rain, the precious grain perishes in the earth. It is the same with continual sunshine; as they knew by experience who procured themselves ceiled houses, while the house of God lay waste: "And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

But, before the famine commenced, God had arranged things for the relief of the sufferers. Joseph was the man sent before them to be the succourer and the saviour, and his mission was from God. *He* sent him. It seemed to be entirely the affair of his brethren, who hated and envied him: but the hand of the Lord was in the whole; and Joseph himself acknowledged it when he disclosed himself: "And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." Thus, though they sold him, God sent him. They were the instruments, but he was the agent. They acted wickedly, but he was righteous

—Yet, what was the character under which he was sent to provide? Was he employed as an ambassador? A commissioner? A corn-factor? No. He was sold as a *servant*. His brethren sold him for a servant to the Ishmaelites—and little did the purchasers know with what a precious charge they were intrusted; little did they think that the lad they saw weeping as he walked, or rode on the camel, was to be the saviour of Egypt and Canaan. And the Ishmaelites sold him for a servant to Potiphar—and little did his master imagine that he was ever to bow the knee to one he had bought for money. There is nothing out of hell, and there is nothing in it, equal to the malice and rage of "an imperious whorish woman." His mistress, disappointed in her cruelty, accuses him, and he is imprisoned. And a circumstance is here mentioned which the history omits: "Whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in irons." Look at that slave in the dungeon, galled with his heavy chains. Will he ever stand before Pharaoh? And ride in the second chariot of the kingdom? And be lord of all the land of Egypt? There seemed to be no prospect of this. There he lies, day after day, month after month, year after year, with no probability of the fulfilment of his dreams, which he had been taught to regard as prophetic—"until the time that" Pharaoh's "word came," to deliver him, "the word of the Lord tried him," that is, the promise of God, by which he engaged to advance him. The accomplishment was delayed; things waxed worse and worse; and thus his confidence, patience, and resignation were sorely exercised. Note, As we try God's word, so God's word tries us; and happy if, when we are tried, we come forth as gold; and the trial of our faith proves more precious than that of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire. This was the case with Joseph. His destination secured him, and the merciful mediation for which he was designed required not only his enlargement but his elevation. Therefore the king not only released him, but "made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance"—one of the most remarkable events recorded in all history.

We may consider this dispensation two ways. First, as an instance of the wonder-working providence of God on the behalf of his people. "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." Let those that live more immediately as dependants on his care, remember that they have no reason to despond. The world is his, and the fullness thereof. Who was seen the righteous forsaken, or their seed begging bread? Ravens fed Elijah. And the widow's oil and meal wasted not. We are not indeed to look for such miracles; but He who performed them is not far from any one of us, and he is as powerful as ever, and sooner all nature shall change than one of his promises fail.

Secondly, as a representation of the Saviour's grace with regard to our spiritual straits. In view of these, he was set up from everlasting. In the fullness of time he came to his own, but they received him not. They despised and rejected him, and sold him for thirty pieces of silver. But he was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. He made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and actually died upon a cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him. What was the elevation of Joseph? Jesus has all power in heaven and in earth. Many others were relieved by Joseph's advancement: but it was peculiarly designed for the salvation of his father's house. Jesus is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe—He is the head over all things unto his body the Church. It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. Therefore to Him let us go, and from his fullness receive, and grace for grace. For a time Joseph's brethren knew not that he was the governor, and had all the corn at his disposal; otherwise they would have gone down earlier, and have appealed to a brother's heart. Yet perhaps one thing might have checked them—a consciousness of their baseness towards him. How can we ever look him in the face? But suppose they had known that he had more than forgiven them; and when he saw them would fall on their necks and kiss them: then they would have gone down, confident, yet feeling much more of their unworthiness than before. Thus should we apply to the Lord Jesus; with hope, rendering us more sensible of our vileness. But let us not keep away from Him. He invites us near. He assures us that while He has plenty we shall not want. Because He lives we shall live also. Let us remember the relation in which He stands to us; and see where and what He now is. In what distress will not this encourage us? "Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

JANUARY 31.

"*In many things we offend all.*"—James iii. 2.

To exemplify this in our conviction, we must estimate our offences according to the mind of God, and not by a human judgment. When David says, "Who can understand his errors?" he means to intimate that no one can be fully acquainted with them. We are too full of self-love; and are too averse to dwell on the discovery of our faults. The heart is

not only desperately wicked, but deceitful above all things; and has a thousand artifices to delude us into a more favourable opinion of ourselves than we deserve. Hence we excuse many evils; we question the guilt of others; and as to those we consider really sinful, we do not condemn them according to their aggravations. From various causes, therefore, we see only a small part of our sins; and we must not suppose we appear in the eyes of God as innocent as we are in our own—In his sight the very heavens are not clean. And does *he* set our iniquities before *him*, our secret sins in the light of *his* countenance?

Neither must we judge of the number of our offences only by our own remembrance of them. We are affected with recent transgressions; but we are not struck with those we were guilty of ten or twenty years ago. And wherefore? Though they are past as to us, they are not so as to God. Nothing is future, nothing is past, with Him—With Him every thing is present—and we are at this very moment committing those sins with Him, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day. Though we have forgotten a countless multitude of our offences, God has forgotten none of them. They are all recorded in the book of his remembrance—and could we consult this awful register of our lives from the beginning, with all the sins of youth and manhood, of secrecy and openness, of infirmity and wilfulness, of purpose and accomplishment; and could we peruse one chapter, or one verse only, we should exclaim—we cannot answer Thee for one of a thousand of our transgressions. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me."

Have we not in many things offended all—First, in our disregard of the Lord Jesus? Secondly, in the neglect and formality of our devotion! Thirdly, in the coldness and contractedness of our charity? Fourthly, in the non-improvement and mis-spending of our time? Fifthly, in our behaviour under the discipline of the rod? Sixthly, in our "temper-flaws unsightly?" Seventhly, in the licence of our tongues? It would be easy to multiply the counts in the indictment. Surely a little reflection upon each of these will convince us of the guilt here acknowledged.

But in what manner should we utter the confession? For tho words are not always used as James and his brethren used them. Some use them as a kind of censure upon others, rather than as a reflection upon themselves: yea, their aim is to screen themselves as culprits in the commonness of the delinquency. Hence, when their conduct is accused, or a monitor reminds them of their misdoings, O, say they, none are exempt from failings; even the best err; in many things we offend all. Others use them without perhaps a bad design; yet they use them vaguely and unimpresively—it is mere lip-service—it comes from nothing—and leads to nothing. But if we properly feel the sentiment we utter, it will be accompanied with deep repentance and godly sorrow—It will make us sensible of our need of the Saviour, and endear to our souls the cross and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—It will hide pride from us, and fill us with self-abasement—It will dispose us to receive and invite reproof—It will keep us from murmuring and repining under divine correction—It will make us tender towards the infirmities of others—It will elevate our views to heaven, and send forth our desires after a state in which we shall never, never sin—and—It will awaken us to caution, carefulness, and zeal: for though we cannot attain perfection here, we may much reduce our imperfections; and should be concerned to make all possible progression in the divine life. Here, as all our offences arise from the depravity of our nature, our business must be to seek for more grace to mortify the principle of sin—for how can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? And as grace uses means, we must inquire where we have most frequently erred, and how we have been most easily overcome; and watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

FEBRUARY 1.

"*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.*"—2. Tim. iv. 16.

This was a very trying case. He was a prisoner, and had appealed unto Cæsar. He had to appear before the tribunal of Nero, the greatest and the most cruel monarch of the earth, to defend himself against one charge, for which he had suffered as an evil-doer even unto bonds. His friends should have rallied around him, encouraging him by their kindness, emboldening him by their presence, exculpating him by their testimony, or softening his judges by their tears and entreaties. It was the custom among the Romans for the connexions of the accused to appear in court in mourning, to show their regard for the prisoner, and to influence the tribunal by their depositions, or their importunity; and sometimes the train that attended them was very large and imposing. But Paul appeared on the day of trial like an outcast, entirely disowned—when he looked around, he saw no one in his favour—the abandonment was extreme—*no* man stood by him—but *all* forsook him! Yet this gives

the Apostle an opportunity to display the excellency of his principles and temper—"I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Hence we may observe,

First—It is no unusual thing for a man to be deserted in the hour of trial. The rich have many friends; but the poor useth entreaties, and often uses them in vain. Some seem to act as if they thought a brother was born for prosperity, instead of adversity. Thus the garden is not forsaken while it abounds with flowers and fruits, but in the dreariness of winter. Are you suffering under such desertion? Remember, your brethren have drunk of this bitter cup before you. In his deep distress, David heard that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. And what was the complaint of Job? "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place." Is it the Scripture only that is continually saying to us, "Cease from man?"

Secondly—See the frailty of good men. For such the persons complained of were, notwithstanding their infirmity on this occasion; and therefore Paul distinguishes them from the hardened persecutor and blasphemer of whom, as an Apostle, he speaks in the verse preceding: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom beware thou also; for he hath greatly withstood our words." Men may be backsliders and not apostates: they may act weakly and not wickedly, or so as to do despite to the Spirit of grace. Thus these persons were friends at heart; their defection was only temporary; and they would soon grieve over it. But the best of men are *but* men. The agency that makes them holy leaves them human. There is nature in them as well as grace. And what affecting and humiliating changes do they sometimes betray! Who could have thought that Elijah, after telling Ahab to his face of his abominations, and slaying all the false prophets, should flee at the threatening of Jezebel, and pray to be released from life? Who, that had seen Peter in the presence of the Roman soldiers draw his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, could have believed that the very same man, a few hours after, would be so overcome with fear, at the question of the damsel in the judgment-hall, as to say, with oaths and curses, I know not the man? So these brethren, when they heard that Paul was coming to make his appeal, went down to meet him as far as Appii-Forum and the three taverns; and when Paul saw them he thanked God, and took courage: yet consulting with flesh and blood, and thinking how many had lately suffered, they yielded to apprehension, and not one of them justified the hope they had excited. Lord, what is man!

Thirdly—How becoming and lovely is a forgiving disposition! However leniently the conduct of these forsakers of Paul may be treated, they were very blameworthy. There was much in their defection to irritate his mind, especially considering what was their duty towards one who was suffering for the cause they professed, and the pretensions of friendship which they had made. Nothing is more felt, more resented, than injury in the hour of want and distress, contrary to every kind and degree of just expectation—yet the bleeding heart here only says, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Imbibe the same spirit, and follow his example. In provocations and complaints dwell not upon the enhancing, but upon the extenuating. Be not implacable, but tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression. It is the noblest of all victories—Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. So the suffering Stephen, under a shower of stones, cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Thus Jesus, as they were nailing him to the cross, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

FEBRUARY 2.

"*Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.*"—2 Tim. iv. 17.

At his first answer before Cæsar he had been deserted of all those whose duty it was to have appeared for him. But to the loss of his friends he opposes the grace of his Saviour—"notwithstanding the Lord stood by me." He was not visible to the assembly; nor did Paul himself perceive him by the eye of sense. His presence was real, but spiritual; and he was with his servant not as a mere witness, but as a helper—He "strengthened me." He confirmed his courage, and gave him self-possession, and freedom of thought and expression. This was no more than he had reason to expect, from his own promise: "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak."

See how He differs from others! They forsake us when we are in distress: He is a present help in trouble. When human dependence fails, he is sure to hold forth his

own arm, and to say, "Trust, and be not afraid." Thus he was with Joseph when sold into Egypt, with Jeremiah in the dungeon, with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, and with Paul when abandoned of all before Nero!

And what a substitute was he for Paul's friends! They would have been nothing without him; but he was every thing without them. If we walk through the valley of the shadow of death with him, we need fear no evil. He is all in all.

What was the design of this interposition? "That by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." The preaching intends the Gospel; and the meaning is, that in this trial he had an opportunity to publish it most advantageously and extensively. What he delivered would spread through the palace and the city; and pervade much further. For at this time Rome was the metropolis of the world; so that what his auditors heard would be reported to others, and extended through all the provinces. How true is it, that though his servants may suffer as evil-doers even unto bonds, yet the word of God is not bound! It can no more be restrained than the flowing of the sea, or the rising of the sun. Yea, the very efforts designed to injure it, have been overruled to aid its progress. Persecution has always turned out to the furtherance of the Gospel.

What was the issue? "And I was delivered from the mouth of the lion." Does he refer to the enemy of souls? He is called a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: and he hoped to prevail with Paul to deny the Saviour's name. Or does he refer to Nero? The Scripture frequently compares wicked men, and especially tyrants, to beasts of prey: and it was impossible to disgrace such a monster as now filled the imperial throne—a wretch who killed his preceptor, had his mother ripped up before his eyes, and entertained himself at supper by the burnings of Christians at the corners of his pleasure-grounds. Yet this hardly agrees with Paul's manner of writing, and the respect he considered due *officially* to his sovereign. The expression therefore is to be considered rather as a phrase significant of a narrow escape from a very pressing jeopardy. Hence David had said, "Save me from the lion's mouth." Paul's case was looked upon not only as dangerous but desperate. He was considered a dead man. Yet the emperor and the senate did nothing against him; but after a hearing, he was sent back simply as a prisoner.

The sufferings of God's servants depend not on the fancies and passions of men, but the providence of God. Their enemies are chained; and wherein they think to deal proudly, he is above them. He restrains or diverts them by his power when he does not govern them by his grace. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

He often permits his people to fall into the greatest extremities, and *then* appears for them, to show his power and glory, and to teach them never to despair. Therefore, ye seed of Jacob, hope in him and wait for him. He whom you serve is continually able to deliver you. He can deliver you not only from the lion's paw, but from the lion's mouth.

FEBRUARY 3.

"*And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*"—2 Tim. iv. 18.

Here he expresses his full assurance of hope, after the trial he had experienced from the desertion of his friends, and the succour he had received from the presence of his Saviour. What he expected, however, was not exemption from trials. He looked for suffering. He knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But he knew also that the Lord would *deliver* him from every evil work—and that, far from allowing him to apostatize or backslide, he would enable him to resist temptation, to hold on his way, to finish his course with joy—and *preserve* him unto his heavenly kingdom.

What a destination! Nothing less than a *kingdom*, a *heavenly* kingdom, *his* heavenly kingdom, procured by him, prepared by him, the same he himself enjoys, and which his followers are to possess with him, according to his promise: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me."

But what is the prospect of such a glorious estate, if we are destroyed before we attain it! It is obvious the Apostle believed in his own perseverance and final salvation. The expressions he uses are not the language of a man in doubt, floating between hope and fear; but of a man fully convinced and assured. And it is delightful to find him expressing the same certainty of mind with regard to all the subjects of divine grace: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Yes, Christians; you may equally rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He has provided for all your wants. He will secure you in every danger. Sin shall not have dominion over you. The God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly. You have overcome them, because greater is he that is in you, than they that are in the world. Yea, in all these things you are more than conquerors.

It is obvious the Apostle derived encour

agement in his expectation from his former experience: the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, and I *was* delivered from the mouth of the lion; and the Lord *shall* deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. The proofs we have had of his mercy and grace should animate us in our dependence; for he is always the same; and one blessing is the pledge of another. The victories of an old soldier feed his courage. David was filled with confidence in his dreadful conflict, by such recollections and reasoning.

But his expectation was founded on the Lord Jesus, as his deliverer and his preserver: the *Lord* shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. He is engaged to do it. He is able to do it. He is able to save unto the uttermost. I can trust him for every period, and with every result. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

What wonder therefore that he should exclaim, "To whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen?" And will you not, Christian, make this Amen your own! It becometh well the just to be thankful. Praise is comely for the upright. It is the most unselfish exercise of your religion; and it will be the most durable. It will be the work, the enjoyment of heaven.

You say, "I hope I am grateful." You hope you are! As if there was any difficulty in determining the thing. Would similar conduct towards an earthly benefactor be deemed grateful! What are the sentiments of your mind? The affections of your heart! The language of your lips! Above all—What is the language of your life! Actions speak louder than words.

Like Paul, be enlarged in your gratitude. Be concerned that his praise may be as lasting as his goodness—that his glory may be *for ever*. Do what you can to advance it, not only while living, but when dying, and even when dead. I mean, by the institutions you have established or supported—by the examples you leave behind you—by the children you have instructed—by the sinners you have converted from the errors of their ways to be a seed to serve him, and which shall be accounted for a generation, and who shall come and declare his righteousness to a nation that shall be born, that he hath done this.

FEBRUARY 4.

"*Then came David to Nob.*"—1 Sam. xxi. 1.

What an extraordinary character was David! How large a portion of the sacred history do his memoirs occupy. And how profitable are they for "doctrine and reproof, and correction, and instruction in righteousness."

He was now informed by Jonathan of Saul's determination to kill him. He is therefore compelled to flee for safety. The tabernacle being at Nob, he repairs thither, in his confusion and distress, both to take an affectionate leave of the house of God which he despaired of seeing again for a long time; and also to obtain succour. He asks Ahimelech the priest whether he can give him any food for his hunger, or weapon for his defence. With regard to the former of these, Ahimelech told him he had nothing under his hand but the sacred loaves. These, however, he gave him; and our Saviour fully justifies the action: "Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the showbread, which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?" Teaching us—that the ceremonies of religion are to give place to the substance; that positive institutions are to yield to moral obligations; that God requireth mercy and not sacrifice. Upon the same principle, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, though the Pharisees condemned our Saviour for healing on this day: and we have known some who have opposed Sunday schools as breaking in upon the command of God.

With regard to the latter, Ahimelech told him that he had nothing but the sword of Goliath, which was wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. What a curiosity was here! How highly it was prized we may learn from the preservation of it in such a place and with such care! Nothing could have been more welcome to David than this weapon—"Give it me," says he; "there is none like it." It had been drawn against himself, and had been taken by his own hand—no one therefore seemed to have a greater title to it than David. It would strengthen his faith more than his arm. It would call to remembrance his former victory, and encourage afresh his confidence in God, being able now to add, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear," and—"from the uncircumcised Philistine," will deliver me from every evil work. So he ought to have reasoned always, and so he sometimes did reason: but, alas! two things occurred here worthy of our remark.

First, the manner of application was blamable. For, to obtain these supplies, he dissembled, affirming that he was employed by the king in a business that required haste. Is this to be justified because it came from a good man? It is the more to be censured. He should have maintained the character of an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile, and who is always to choose suffering rather than sin. But we see how well afflictions are

called *trials*, and how difficult it is to act consistently in some conditions. How becoming is candour in judging others! Who knows that he should have acted better under the same pressure of circumstances? How necessary the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!" Secondly, the issue was tragical. For while the parties were having this intercourse, a man named Doeg happened to be there "detained before the Lord." This wretch, instead of minding his devotion, observed them, and resolved to ingratiate himself with his master Saul by an impeachment of Ahimelech. And so it fell out. "Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." Behold, first, the deceitfulness of this villain. Like other slanderers, he does the business by a mixture of fact and falsehood. He ought to have told Saul that David had deceived Ahimelech, and made him believe that he was acting for the king; and therefore that what Ahimelech did was really in honour of the king. The whole truth would have entirely exculpated the high priest, but Doeg suppresses the most essential part of it. And behold, secondly, the cruelty as well as falseness of this informer. "And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house." There was something venerable in the character and office of a priest, and as Ahimelech and his brethren stood dressed in their sacred robes, Saul's footmen shrunk back from slaying them. "And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword."

But see upon what little occurrences surprising coincidences and great consequences often depend. The word of the Lord had denounced the house of Eli: but the threatening could not be fulfilled without the destruction of these priests: but these priests would not have been destroyed but for the malice of Saul; Saul's malice would not have been excited but for the infamy of Doeg; and Doeg would not have informed against Ahimelech had he not been detained at the tabernacle the day when David entered it. All this seemed accidental; but it was not. All parties acted freely, yet necessarily too. What was unjust in Doeg was righteous in God. He knew how to accomplish his word by human falsehood and cruelty, and yet he was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Nothing was more certain as well as important than the death of Christ, and he was delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; yet by wicked hands the Jews crucified him. Ask me not for a solution. I only know the fact. I see the two ends of the chain, but the middle is under water: yet the connexion is as real as it is invisible. By-and-by it will be drawn up. In the meanwhile, we must walk by faith, and not by sight. Judge nothing before the time. We know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

FEBRUARY 5.

"When I am weak, *then am I strong*."
2 Cor. xii. 10.

Christianity is not only mysterious with regard to doctrine, but also experience. Christians are men wondered at. They are a peculiar people; and the world knoweth them not. Some of the effects and advantages of their religion, indeed, may be palpable to others; but its principles and resources are among the deep things of God, which the natural man knoweth not, because they are spiritually discerned. How strange to many must the language of Paul appear—"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "Most gladly will I glory in infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me—I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG."

As this expresses his experience not only or principally as he was an Apostle, but a Christian, let us in this exercise consider the weaknesses to which he refers; and in the next see how it becomes an accession of strength.

The weakness is spiritual. But we must distinguish between the reality of it, and the apprehension. The fall has deprived us not only of righteousness, but of strength; and by nature we are weak, as to all the purposes of the divine life. But all are not sensible of this. In general, men are far from believing it; and will sooner acknowledge their guilt than their inability. They will confess that they have not been what they ought to have been, or done what they ought to have done, but they always presume upon their competency for these things; and resolve by-and-by to accomplish them. But Paul speaks of the *apprehension* of our weakness. This is effected by the Holy Spirit; who convinces men of sin, and makes them acquainted with their true character and state before God. But the sense of their weakness is *increased* by observation and experience. They hear of many falling around them who once seemed

much more likely to stand than themselves; and each of these declensions cries, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." And when they read the Scriptures, they see the falls of good men there, and men whose grace was very superior to their own: and can they help fearing for themselves, when they find Abraham betrayed into dissimulation by unbelief; Moses speaking unadvisedly with his lips; Job cursing the day of his birth; Solomon playing the fool; and Peter acting the coward! The events of life also enlarge their self-acquaintance. Who knows what he is till he is tried, and till he meets with his own trial! For every one is not discovered in the same way: and as Joab adhered to David in the rebellion of Absalom, yet turned aside after Adonijah; so we may be firm in one peril, and fail in another. Afflictions are frequently called temptations, because they try and prove us: and where is the Christian who, in consequence of these experiments, has not been led, if not to question the reality of his religion, to mourn over the deficiencies of it! Thus fresh and painful secrets are constantly coming to light; and the knowledge of their depravity, which they could not have borne at once, is produced by little and little. "And where," says the Christian, often appalled, "where will the mystery end? Who can understand his errors? Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Thus he often seems worse, because he is wiser. There is not more in him of unbelief, and impatience, and vain thought; but he sees and feels more of them.

And how far does this sense of the Christian's weakness extend! He feels that he is unable to do what he *ought*. His work is laid down in the Scripture. It requires him to run the race that is set before him; to fight the good fight of faith; and to perform a thousand duties with regard to God, his neighbour, and himself—the view of which forces him to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things!" He feels that he is unable to do what he *would*. To will *is* present, but how to perform that which is good, he finds not. He would gladly flee, but the wires of his cage tell him that he is a prisoner. He attempts to sing, but his voice is untuned; and his harp is hung on the willows, and sometimes too high for him to reach. He feels that he is unable to do what *he has done*. His former experience humbles him. "O that it was with me as in months past!" I fear I shall never pray again as I have prayed. Never trust in the promise as I have trusted. Never kneel before the cross again as I once did, and said—

> "Here it is I find my heaven,
> While upon the Lamb I gaze."

He feels that he is unable to do *the least duty*. He always thought himself inadequate, were he called to die at the stake, or to offer up an Isaac: but he is beyond this now. He now feels that he cannot order his speech properly in company; nor endure, with Christian temper, the trifling vexations of the hour—yea, that without Christ he "can do nothing." He feels unable to preserve himself from the *greatest* sins. He once thought that he was in no danger from these; and supposed that reputation, and common prudence, would secure him from *such* miscarriages. But he now prays with David, not only, cleanse thou me from secret faults, but keep back thy servant *also* from presumptuous sins.

And what is there to meet all this weakness! When he examines, he finds that nothing is sufficient. He cannot depend on *the grace he has received*—He can no more live without fresh supplies of the Spirit, than he can see with the light, and respire with the air, of yesterday. He cannot depend upon his *present frames*. These may be lively and delightful; but they are of the nature of cordials, not food—he cannot live by them. He knows too how variable they are; and how often rapture has ended in gloom. He cannot depend upon his *resolutions and vows*. He has seen their vanity in binding his depraved heart. Though they seemed invincible, they have yielded in the hour of temptation: and before the assaults of the enemy, they have been no more than a hedge of cobwebs, or a wall of vapour. He cannot depend upon *means and ordinances*. He values these, and will be found in the use of them; they are his privilege as well as duty. But unless the Lord give the increase, Paul plants and Apollos waters in vain. We are to wait *only* upon God. His influences and communications can alone relieve and elevate, refresh and strengthen the soul. This seems a discouraging state of mind to be in—but what follows?

FEBRUARY 6.

"*When I am weak*, THEN AM I STRONG."
2 Cor. xii. 10.

THE consciousness of our spiritual weakness becomes the accession of strength three ways.

First, as it inspires us with diffidence and caution. It will keep us from *venturing* into the company of the infidel and the wicked, lest we learn of their ways, and get a snare to our souls. It will restrain us from scenes and places of dissipation where there is so much temptation, and we feel we have so little power of resistance. He who knows how much tinder he has about him will not invite sparks. The humble will always be self-diffident. He will not vainly think that he can withstand where others are overcome. Therefore he will not make haste to

be rich, lest he should not be innocent, but fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. He will perfectly tremble at the thought of the love of money, since God tells him it is the root of all evil. He will not exercise himself in great matters, or in things too high for him; he finds himself unequal to the difficulties and dangers of superior offices and employments. If God calls him into an arduous and perilous situation, the call insures his safety and assistance; but presumption has nothing to plead. He will therefore look for his commission; and follow God, instead of going before him. The Jews would go up the hill—but the ark remained behind. What was the consequence? The enemy easily discomfited them, and chased them like bees. The self-sufficient are never safe, because no one can warn them of danger without giving offence: but the man who knows himself, and is not highminded, welcomes admonition and even reproof; and says, Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Secondly, as it makes us more prayerful. When a man, concerned for his safety and welfare, finds that he cannot rely upon himself, he will naturally look after another to rely upon. So did Jehoshaphat in the pressure of his straits: "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." And thus, when the weak sees an adversary approaching, he will not go forth to meet him alone; but hasten and call upon the Captain of his salvation to come to his succour: and thus he succeeds. What is prayer but an application to the strong for strength? And as in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, but we cannot hope for its aid without asking and seeking; it follows, that nothing can strengthen us like prayer. It is availing ourselves of Omnipotence. It is our being strong in the Lord and the power of his might. The babe cannot support himself: yet he is not abandoned. Provision is made for him in another: and what his little hands cannot accomplish for him, his cries and tears can effect. The mother hears him, and flies to relieve and indulge. She, even she, may indeed forget; or prove unkind or unable: but the God of all grace never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. Therefore,

Thirdly, as it encourages and animates the soul by bringing us under the certainty of divine promise. There is something very winning and endearing in confidence. Who could take away the life of a bird that fled to his bosom from the pounce of the hawk? or who could take advantage of having him in his hand to deprive the little trembler even of his liberty! Nothing is ever lost by trusting in the ingenuous and nobleminded: they always feel a responsibility to repay the confidence reposed in them. What then may we not expect from the God of all comfort! But not only does the honour of his goodness incline him to succour those who rely on him, but also the honour of his truth. For has he not said, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble? He filleth the hungry with good things; but the rich he hath sent empty away?"

Therefore you need not be afraid to know the evil of your spiritual condition; since suitable relief of every kind is provided—And we see what is indeed the most enviable state and frame of mind you can be in. The best evidence of prosperity in the divine life is not great knowledge and ecstasy; but lowliness of mind. "He that abaseth himself shall be exalted." "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." "With the lowly is wisdom." "With him also is affluence and might"—"when I am weak, then am I strong."

And let it comfort us that our resource is not future only, but immediate. We cannot doubt of our being strong in heaven. There our powers will be fully equal to every demand upon them. There we shall be able to serve him day and night in his temple, feeling no languor, and requiring no repose. But we are strong not only after weakness, but in it—"*when* I am weak, *then* am I strong." "As thy day so shall thy strength be." "I will water it *every moment*."

Thus, out of weakness I am made strong. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

FEBRUARY 7.

"*Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*"—1 Thes. iii. 11.

In order, as it is said, in the foregoing verse, to "see their face, and perfect that which was lacking in their faith." But two remarks arise from the words.

The first is of a doctrinal character, and regards a leading article of the faith once delivered to the saints—"Our Lord Jesus" is here addressed in prayer, as well as "God himself and our Father," and even with him. This cannot be confounded with the practice of the Romish Church in praying to the Virgin Mary, and a multitude of patron saints. Such prayers have no authority from the Scriptures; and the persons to whom they are addressed, being mere creatures only, can have no knowledge of the wants and feelings of thousands that may address them at the same time. But the manner in which the Saviour speaks of himself, before he left the earth, shows the reasonableness of our addressing *him:* "Lo," said he, "I am with you always, even unto the end of

the world." "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." "He that loveth me shall be loved by my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." He therefore, though unseen, is accessible; omnipresent; knows all things; is able and engaged to manage all our concerns: and because he lives we shall live also. Hence the first Christians are described, as "calling on the Name of the Lord Jesus." Hence Stephen, when dying, and full of the Holy Ghost, invoked him. And Paul, not only in the text, but in various other places, is chargeable with the same idolatry, as it certainly must be deemed, without conceding his divinity. Indeed he begins all his Epistles with this salutation and benediction: "Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." In one instance, he has even reversed the order before us, and in his supplication, places the Saviour before the Father: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." And if we pass from the Church below to the Church above, where, though their prayers are ended, they are still praising; how are their praises expressed? "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Is this adoration confined to the saints? "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Is there no exception? "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Be not therefore faithless, but believing; in all your dependence and hope; and exclaim, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

The second remark is of a practical nature: "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, *direct our way unto you.*" Does not the example of Paul and his brethren in this case teach us, that we ought to consider our visits and journeys as under the influence of a special Providence? We are not to confine religion to extraordinary occasions; but to acknowledge God in all our ways; and in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make our requests known unto him. We are to love the Sabbath, and remember to keep it holy: but we must serve God every day, and be in the fear of the Lord all the day long. We are to repair to the sanctuary, and to enter the closet: but we must abide with God in our calling; and whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God. Paul speaks of "a prosperous journey by the will of God;" and John enjoins his friends to bring "the brethren on their journey after a godly sort."

And what is the truth of the case? "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." Have we a journey or a visit in prospect! We must ask the permission, and implore the blessing of Him in whom we live and move and have our being. He can stop our breath; or lay us on a bed of languishing. If we achieve our undertaking, he can subvert the design of it, or mar all our satisfaction in it. How much often depends upon a single excursion! It may terminate in a friendship the most important, or a connexion for life. It may lead us into temptation; and we may be ensnared by error or vice. It may produce trials and losses the most painful; and we may return, compelled to say, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Perhaps, when we leave home, we unconsciously take leave of our house, and field, and garden, to return no more; and the places that once knew us will know us no more for ever!

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help. Happy he who can rejoice in the promise: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

FEBRUARY 8.

"*The body is dead because of sin.*"
Rom. viii. 10.

The language is striking; for the Apostle does not say, the body *will* die, but the body "*is dead.*" The reason is, because the sentence is passed, and when the judge has condemned the criminal, we say, he is a dead man. In the case before us too, the execution of the sentence is commenced. And when a man is old, or infirm, or diseased, we say, he is as good as dead; he has one foot in the grave. Owing to the casualties of our condition, and the frailties of our frame, there is but a step between us and death. We are not only mortal in destination, but in state. We decay while we receive support. Before we reach our journey's end, our strength is weakened in the way, our senses lose their

efficiency, and desire fails. Before the tabernacle is completely taken down, some pin is taken out, some cord is loosened, some rents or wearings away in the canvassare visible. We talk of a dying hour; but we die daily. When a bottle is discharged of its contents, there is a last drop; but every preceding drop emptied it as well as the last. Young says, "our cradle rocks us to the tomb." And Watts tells us, "the moment we begin to live, we all begin to die." Who thinks of this?

But how profitable would the meditation be! Pamper not that dying body—"meats for the belly and the belly for meats, but God will destroy both it and them." Be not proud of thy beauty and charms. The coral is leaving thy lips; the tints are fading from thy cheeks; the grave, the worms are ready for thee. The body *is* dead—insult not the poor carcass by dressing it up in vanity and gaiety of attire. The pilot goes to the very end of the vessel to steer it: and you must repair to the end of life to conduct it. Hence the exclamation, and the prayer of Moses: "O that they were wise! that they understood this! that they would consider their latter end!" "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

But the Apostle remarks the cause or the reason of the event. "The body is dead because of sin." Death is not therefore, as it is foolishly called, a debt due to nature, but to the justice of God. Sin is the introducer of death. We die not from any physical necessity, like plants and animals: God indeed could have rendered these everduring, but he did not make them to be so. Man only was made immortal, but he forfeited his immortality; and therefore, though all creatures die as well as man, he only is called mortal, (for we never speak of a mortal bird or beast) as if in reproach for his becoming so by disobeying the command of God, and voluntarily incurring the penalty threatened: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What a murderer is here! Survey all the myriads of the dead, and ask, "Who slew all these?" And hear the decision of Truth itself: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men because all have sinned."

But in the case of a Christian, and of such Paul is speaking, there is another reason for the assertion, and the body is dead not only because of the desert of sin, but the removal of it. During life there is an internal war in believers: the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that they cannot do the things that they would. Death ends the strife, by killing one of the parties, and making the other more than a conqueror. The Apostle speaks of the sin that dwelt in nim: and such is the inherency of this evil. that the body which is the residence of it, resembles the house of leprosy which was to be taken down to get rid of the infection. And this will serve to explain a difficulty. For it may be asked, if Christ has redeemed them, bearing their sin in his own body on the tree; and they are justified by his blood, and saved from wrath through him; why do they yet die? To which we answer, they die, as they suffer affliction. Affliction is not a judicial infliction, but is only corrective and medicinal; and though like all natural evil derived originally from sin, is, as God employs it, the effect and token of his love. So Christ has abolished death as far as it is a curse: and thus the Christian does not die: there is nothing penal in his death; yea, death is a privilege, a deliverer. It delivers him not only from a world lying in wickedness, but from the plague of his own heart, from his inbred corruptions, and even from the flesh and blood which cannot without change and renovation inherit the kingdom of God. Thus the enemy is converted into a friend. The sting is taken out of the bee, but the honey remains. The lion is not only slain, but out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness.

Ahasuerus issued a decree, that all the Jews should be destroyed, and as no law of the Medes and Persians could be changed, the decree could not be revoked: but it could be superseded. The people were apprized of their danger, and called upon to defend themselves, and furnished with the means of safety and victory; and thus the day of their destruction was turned into a day of triumph and joy, and they made it a festival which they still observe. Thus it is appointed unto men once to die; and the sentence is irreversible. Believers themselves cannot escape the decree, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But by the resources of the Gospel the curse is turned into a blessing, and to die is gain. And if there be a period on which the spirits of just men made perfect reflect with peculiar pleasure and praise, it is the time of their escape from earth to heaven. The approach of it had often alarmed them; but the consequences are inconceivably great; and *these* they always viewed with desire-

> "O glorious hour, O blest abode!
> I shall be near, and like my God;
> And flesh and sin no more control
> The sacred pleasures of the soul."

FEBRUARY 9.

"*So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.*"
1 Cor. ix. 26.

Behold the boxer in the Grecian games. First, he often practised in feigned combat, exercising and extending his arms and hands with his gloves on, to acquire greater agility and skill. This was comparatively easy: this

required no fortitude, and produced little exhaustion. But see him afterwards, when actually engaged with his antagonist—How he agonizes! How he stretches every muscle, and strains every nerve! Here was the trial. Who does not perceive what a difference there was between these! Between the feigned and the real combat! Between beating the air, and beating the adversary! But, says the Apostle, I resemble the combatant not in the former, but in the latter of these—"So fight I, not as one that beateth the air."

So it is with every Christian. He has to fight; and whatever defective or erroneous notions may obtain concerning it, he finds it to be, not an imaginary, but an actual conflict; the most serious and trying in which he can ever be engaged. The enemy he encounters has every quality that can render him formidable. The struggle is constant, and admits of no interval of repose or relaxation. The consequences are inexpressibly momentous and interesting. Salvation or damnation, hell or heaven, everlasting happiness or woe, depend on his success or failure.

It is no easy thing, therefore, to be a Christian indeed. Those who think otherwise, prove that they never made the trial in earnest; and are strangers to the language of the Scripture. There we read of striving to enter in at the strait gate; of pressing into the kingdom of God; of the violent who take it by force; of running the race that is set before us; of enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. It is admitted that these are metaphorical expressions; but they must be founded in truth: and what is the truth intended by them? If it be taken from the lowest interpretation, it is enough to condemn many: for surely *they* must fall short of the requirement who have a name that they live, but are dead; who wear the form of godliness, but deny the power; whose religion allows them to be at ease in Zion, retaining every evil passion, every worldly indulgence; and is distinguished by nothing like exertion or sacrifice. "But then real Christians are few." And says not the Saviour the same! "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Men would be happy without being holy: without diligence; without contention. But no sluggard, no coward, ever entered heaven. "Win and wear it," says Latimer, "is the motto inscribed on the crown for which we strive." And says the Amen, the faithful Witness, "If *any* man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

And, therefore, a religious course should be entered upon with solemn thought and deliberation. We should sit down and consider the difficulties, dangers, and exertions that will attend it. For if we begin under a mistaken notion, and reckoning only upon what is pleasing and peaceful, we shall peradventure repent when we see war, and return into Egypt. Hence many have taken up a profession of godliness, and soon laid it down again, to the disgrace of the cause of Christ, and the enhancement of their own condemnation; for the last state of such men is worse than the first.

But this should not discourage those that are heartily disposed for the warfare. There is enough to justify their choice, and to animate them to go forward, notwithstanding all they ought to look for in the divine life.

And if you are already engaged, and you are constrained to say, Whatever others find it, I feel it to be a conflict truly serious and trying: I *feel* daily and hourly the sentiment of Paul: "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air:" remember that it is the same with all your brethren in the world, and has been so with all the glorified now before the Throne—

> "Once they were mourning here below,
> And wet their couch with tears;
> They wrestled hard, as we do now,
> With sins, and doubts, and fears."

It would be awful if you were not acquainted with this conflict. But your experience is a token for good. The strong man armed keepeth his palace and his goods in peace. It is the delivered soul that is the subject of this contest. Say not, why am I thus! You are thus, because the Lord has chosen you to be a soldier: because his grace has produced in you principles alien to nature, and which have roused all the powers of darkness. And you shall be furnished with supplies and succours. And as your day, so shall your strength be. And armour is provided for you the most tried and complete. And it is a good fight in which you are engaged: it will bear examination; every review will afford you pleasure; every good being in the universe is on your side, and wishes you success. And your victory is sure and near. Earth is a tiresome place: but you are not to live here always. Now, if one temptation is overcome, another succeeds. But the warfare will soon be accomplished. Death will proclaim the triumph. How sweet will rest be after toil; and peace after such a fight!

FEBRUARY 10.

"*For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely, in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*"—Psalm xxxii. 6.

David knew there was a general sameness of views and feelings in the subjects of divine grace. Hence from his own experience he inferred the disposition and conduct of the godly in all future ages—they would do what he had done, and find the same relief. He refers, however, to the *result* of his case when

ne had been brought into a proper state of mind, and not to the commencement of it which he himself censures. For we are here furnished with a fact which does not appear in the history of David. It is commonly supposed, that after his grievous fall, till Nathan reproved him, he had been careless and stupified; and this has often been adduced as a proof of the hardening nature of sin. But the thing was far otherwise. He was all the while tortured in his mind, yet unwilling to humble himself before God, and condemn himself before men, as he ought to have done—He kept silence, and endeavoured to pass off the distress by time, palliation, and excuse. But the repression and concealment of his anguish preyed not only upon his peace, but his health, and endangered life itself. At length he was reduced to the deepest penitence, and threw himself, by an unqualified confession, on the compassion of God. This was a wise course, and we shall do well to follow his example. Under a sense of guilt we should not keep away from God, but enter his presence, and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This will melt the heart into "godly sorrow" better than all legal terrors; and we know who hath said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Hence says David, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

He then adds: "For *this* shall every one that is godly pray unto thee." Here we see not only that all the godly pray, but every one of them prays for pardon. This is the very thing which our Saviour teaches his disciples: "When ye pray, say—forgive us our trespasses." And this praying does not only regard the manifestation of forgiving mercy, as some would have it, but the exercise of it. For in many things we offend all; yea, in every thing we come short of the glory of God. If He should mark what we do amiss, we could not stand before him, even for the sins of our holy things. A faithful examination of the most innocent hour of our lives, and the devoutest act of our worship, must bring us upon our knees, crying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." From the beginning to the end our hope must be a "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

But here is a season of audience—"In a time when thou mayest be found." There is a time, therefore, when he will not be found. Hence the force of the admonition, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Life is the time not only to serve, but to seek the Lord,—

> "There are no acts of pardon past
> In the cold grave to which we haste."

At death, the bridge is drawn; the door is shut. Yet, during life, there are some periods more favoured than others. Paul sought the Lord thrice for deliverance before the promise of all-sufficient grace was given him. God heard Moses at one time, not another. How long did Abraham and Isaac pray before they received the answer! But the time of finding, when we pray for pardoning grace, is the hour in which David found it; which was the moment he entirely condemned himself and justified God—God is always more ready to pardon than we are to confess.

And blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. He is free from all condemnation; and in whatever condition he is found, he dwells safely, and may be in quiet from the fear of evil—"Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." Floods of great waters mean numerous and pressing calamities, from which few are exempted in this vale of tears—But how is it said, they do not come nigh unto the godly! Are not the afflictions of the righteous many! Did they not come nigh Joseph when he was cast into the pit, and when in prison he was fettered with irons? "Not come nigh me," says many a living Christian; "they have washed away half my comforts already, and I fear my heart will be overwhelmed within me"—The language of the Scripture is bold, and often requires to be qualified; but it is always founded on truth. It is undeniable that God in public and general sufferings has frequently secured his servants; as we see in the case of Noah, and Lot, and the Jews in Egypt. And God is always *able* to do this for his people. And nothing *shall* befall them without his permission and appointment. Nothing shall injure them. Yea, every loss and trial shall conduce to their welfare. But hear David's own explanation subjoined: "Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Thus the believer is like a man in a strong hold built upon a rock. In the flood, the water may surround him, but does not touch him. It will also roll off, and he will walk abroad again. Thus it is said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed." And in the final disaster that will carry away every thing, it shall not come nigh unto him, but only with his eyes shall he see the reward of the wicked—

> "When desolation, like a flood,
> On the proud sinner rolls;
> Saints find a refuge in their God,
> For he redeem'd their souls."

FEBRUARY 11.

"*The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness.*"—Jer. xxxi. 2.

The expression, "the people which were left of the sword," refers to the perils the Israelites escaped before their journey began. In Egypt they were in danger of being cut off by excess of toil, and the bloody decree which doomed all their male children to destruction. They were also likely to be cut off at once, when Pharaoh pursued them to the Red Sea. From all these jeopardies the Lord's hand saved them. "But," you say, "he brought them into a wilderness." He did—Yet they had no reason to complain of their condition: they "found grace in the wilderness." And such, Christians, has been your experience.

What the Jews did not derive *from* their condition, they yet received *in* it—They "found grace in the wilderness." This was essentially the presence of God with them, according to the prayer of Moses: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." Hence no nation was so great, because they had God so nigh unto them in all that they called upon him for.

They found in the wilderness, providing grace? And have not you? The cup of some of you has been running over. You have had all things richly to enjoy. Others have been more sensibly dependent. Yet he has not suffered you to want. In his feeding and clothing you, there has been less of miracle, but not less of reality, than in feeding and clothing the Jews. You have not had the widow's cruse of oil and barrel of meal; but your supplies have not failed you. Ravens have not sustained you; but you have had relief from the most unlikely characters. You have also had comfort in your temporal blessings; you have tasted the love of God in them. He has blessed your bread and your water; and hence the little you have had, has been better than the riches of many wicked.

They found in the wilderness, pardoning grace. And have not you? It was said of them, "How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." And has not this been your case? In many things you have offended, and in every thing come short of the glory of God. How ungrateful, forgetful, distrustful, incorrigible, have you been! Reflect for a moment on the sins of your holy things; review your sabbaths, your communions, your omissions of duty, and the imperfections of your motives when your actions have been materially right—Has he dealt with you according to your desert? Has he not spared you according to the greatness of his mercy?

They found in the wilderness, conducting grace. And have not you? They had a fiery cloudy pillar to go before them, to determine all their journeyings, and which left them not, till it had guided them to the rest which the Lord their God gave them. And you know the way of man is not in himself. How ignorant, how short-sighted, how easily imposed upon, have you been! How mistaken have you been, when most confident! How deceived have you been in your hopes and fears! How often have you wished to escape things which have proved a blessing; and to obtain things which would have proved your bane! Into what embarrassments would you have fallen, had you been left to lean to your own understanding! But he has fulfilled the promise, "I am the Lord thy God, that teacheth thee to profit, and that leadeth thee in the way that thou shouldst choose." And he will be your guide even unto death.

They found in the wilderness, preserving grace. As he led them about and instructed them, so he kept them as the apple of his eye. And have you not found the same grace? Why have not your enemies, so superior in every respect to yourselves, triumphed over you? The Lord has been on your side. You have been kept by the power of God.

They found in the wilderness, assisting grace. What was said of Asher applied to them all; "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." He made them equal to their travails and their trials. He gave them his Sabbaths. He sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before them. They had the services of the Priests; the messages of the Prophets; the communings of the mercy-seat. And has he not sent *you* help from the sanctuary, and strengthened you out of Zion? You have had his ordinances. You have heard his word. You have known him in his palaces for a refuge. His Spirit has helped your infirmities. When you have said, "I am cast out of his sight," you have been enabled to look again towards his holy temple. You dreaded the day of trouble; but when it arrived, there arrived with it the grace to help in time of need—Where shall I end?

But remember—First, that *all* you have possessed and enjoyed, deserving the name of good, has been *grace*. Secondly, you would have seen much more of this grace in the wilderness, had you been more observant: for "whoso is wise, and will *observe* these things, even *he* shall understand the loving-

kindness of the Lord." Thirdly, how much more of this grace which you have found in the wilderness will you see hereafter, than you are aware of now! Then the divine dispensations concerning you will be finished; your capacity for reviewing them will be complete; and you will fully see the bearing of them all upon your welfare—Then for the song—"O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever—To HIM THAT LED HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE WILDERNESS; for his MERCY ENDURETH FOR EVER!"

FEBRUARY 12.

"*And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision.*"—1 Sam. iii. 15.

EVERY thing in the history and character of Samuel is attractive and interesting. His birth was in answer to prayer. He was sanctified from the womb; and was dedicated to the service of the sanctuary as soon as he was weaned. Among the Jews there were three weanings. The first was at the end of three years; this was the weaning from the mother's breast. The second was at the end of seven years; this was the weaning from the dry nurse. The third was at the end of twelve years; this was the weaning from childish manners. At the latter period the Jewish children began to attend the public solemnities; and at this age therefore we find our Saviour in the midst of the doctors in the temple. This we presume was the season when Hannah left Samuel at Shilo, under the care of old Eli; for we see that he immediately "worshipped the Lord there;" and was capable of rendering himself useful in the services of the tabernacle.

Some length of time after this, the Lord addressed him in the night, and delivered to him an awful message concerning Eli. "And Samuel lay until the morning." He seems to have had none of those apprehensions which other children suffer from the dread of darkness, and apparitions, and sounds deemed ominous. But did he sleep during the watches of the night? We presume not. The wonderfulness of the occurrence, the divinity of the Speaker, and the import of the message, would be likely to hold his eyes waking, and fully employ his thoughts and meditations.

But he "opened the doors of the house of the Lord." Though distinguished and dignified by such a vision, he does not feel himself raised above his humble office, but repairs to his usual employment with alacrity. He that is not faithful in little, will not be faithful in much: but principle, diligence, and cheerfulness, in a private and inferior condition, are the best preparatives for, and the surest pledges of, good behaviour in higher and more public situations. And why should any kind of labour be considered as low, or degrading? What were our hands made for, but to be used? Every kind and degree of usefulness is respectable, is honourable. The most despised character in the community should be the man who does nothing, and has nothing to do.

We here see that the call of God does not draw us away from our stations, and make us indifferent to the ordinary functions of life; but should dispose us to act more wisely and piously in the discharge of them. "Let every man," says the Scripture, "abide in the calling in which he is called of God." The sun is as regular as he is beneficent: he daily rises and descends, and pursues his course always in the same way. The comet is eccentric; breaks forth for a while, and then disappears; yet it excites more notice for the time than the orb of day. Some we fear are tempted to step aside from their own proper sphere by the attention they attract; and they will endeavour to justify themselves by appeals to their usefulness. And they may do good; but God has not required this at their hands: and every man is not only most respectable, but most useful, when he keeps within his own circle, and fills it to advantage. Religion is the most orderly principle in the world. It teaches us to give every thing its place, time, and importance. The most zealous of its advocates was as wise as he was warm; and could say, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." We always suspect those who, looking after something new and extraordinary, are carried away from the plain path of revelation, reason, and common sense. "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way." Let wives remember this, who gad about after favourite preachers, and forget their domestic arrangements, and unbelieving husbands. Let servants think of this, who by religious gossipings render themselves unpunctual in the claims of their places. Let those who are too devout to be moral; too fervent in spirit to be diligent in business; let the proud, the unruly, the roving, the idle, weigh well the language of the Apostle to the Thessalonians: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ,

that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing."

Some intrusted with such a secret could not have contained it without swelling and bursting. They would have risen, and rushed forth, and have proclaimed to their connexions the privilege by which they had been honoured. There was nothing of this in Samuel. He was not elated or vain. He rises only at the usual hour, and performs his accustomed work; and is not eager to announce the transaction even to Eli. Empty vessels sound loudest; and shallow brooks babble most. A man of learning will not, like a smatterer, be always referring to the original, or quoting scraps of Latin and Greek. Modesty and diffidence always attend true greatness, in nature and in grace. Though Paul had a vision that rapt him into the third heaven, and he knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body, he concealed it for fourteen years, and then divulged it by compulsion. Luther said, "Though I am an old man, and have preached so long, I never think of preaching without trembling." How unlike the carelessness, the forwardness, the boldness of many a novice in the ministry! What a contrast between the reserve, the retiringness, the humility of the lovely Samuel; and the self-conceit, and assurance, and arrogance, and talkativeness of many of the young in our day! "Exhort young men to be sober-minded." "And let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."

But why was he "afraid to show Eli the vision?" Had Eli treated him with distance and harshness, so that he dreaded to offend him by the communication? Far from it. Eli always erred on the side of softness and indulgence, not severity. And we may be assured that he loved Samuel, and treated the little Levite as a son that served with a father. His fear, therefore, arose from the tenderness of his disposition, from his regard to the High Priest, and his veneration for his age and office. Hence he was pained, and shrunk back from the annunciation of the judgment threatened. It is said, bad news never wants wings. But the reason is to be found in the tempers of men: it affords them gratification; and therefore out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Evil would spread slowly if people were like-minded with Samuel. What some call faithfulness is the indulgence of their harsh feelings. They are at home, and in their element, when they censure and condemn. They often say, "I am very sorry to mention it;" when they are conscious of pleasure, and their very manner betrays it to others. Never reprove without cause; and then do it in the spirit of meekness, as a surgeon probes the wound of his child. When Paul tells the Philippians of some who were the enemies of the cross of Christ, and whose end was destruction, he does it with "weeping." And Jesus "wept" when he foretold the doom of Jerusalem, where he was going to be crucified. If ministers deal in the menaces of Scripture, let them show that they speak with concern—having compassion—and knowing the terror of the Lord, *persuade* men.

FEBRUARY 13.

"*Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"—Matt. x. 31.

HERE is obviously an implication of something going before. Our Saviour is speaking of the doctrine of Providence, and he would establish not only the truth but the *extent* of it. Some conceive of God as presiding over whole systems, but regardless of individuals, and the minute concerns of his creatures. This philosophical or half infidel notion, if designed, so to speak, to relieve the Supreme Being, only dishonourshim; as if an infinite understanding was perplexed, or an almighty power wearied—"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Besides, a general providence involves a particular; as a whole is made up of the parts, and a universality is only the aggregate of the particulars. The truth of the case too is also proved by facts; for we actually find that nothing is overlooked, but every thing, however small and apparently insignificant, presents undeniable indications of divine power, contrivance, and care. And this is what our Saviour here teaches his disciples. And to impress them the more, he has two references. The one is taken from themselves—"the very hairs of your head are all numbered." What could express more strongly the minuteness of Providence? According to this assertion, God takes more care of us than we take of ourselves: for if we number our books, our cattle, or our houses, we never think of numbering our hairs; and if one of these falls off, we never observe or feel the trifling loss. And if he attends to the least, will he neglect the greatest of our interests? The other is derived from the inferior creatures. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of *them* shall not fall on the ground without your heavenly Father." How natural and unavoidable then the inference: "Fear *ye* not, therefore, *ye* are of more value then many sparrows."

The estimation is comparative—"ye are of *more* value than many sparrows." Sparrows therefore have *their* value; and we are reminded that we are no more to despise than to abuse any of the animal tribes. They have all their place and uses. No angel in heaven could produce one of the meanest of them. They are the work of God's fingers: all praise him; and he deems none of them beneath his regard. But there is a gradation

in his productions; and he himself ranks some of them above others. Thus he magnifies his word above all his Name; and tells us of his creating new heavens and a new earth, so superior to the old, that the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. A plant is above a pebble; a bird above a plant; a man above a bird. The supremacy of man appears in his being made the lord of this lower world, and having had all creatures put under him, and given him not only for service but food. Hence he said to Noah, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb." Though man is now a fallen creature, and he cannot think too meanly of himself before God, yet he has physical endowments which place him only a little lower than the angels. He is capable of a thousand operations inconceivably above the reach of the beasts that perish. How superior is *his* reason to *their* instinct! *They* soon reach the extent of their ability, beyond which there is no advance or improvement; but what wonders have *his* faculties achieved! and what bounds can be fixed to their expansion and progress? He teaches us more than the beasts of the field, and makes us wiser than the fowls of the air; for there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. And this spirit in man is not only immaterial, but immortal. The body dies, but the spirit returns to God who gave it, and will behold the heavens and the earth pass away, survive the dissolution of all things, and live for ever. He is therefore not only of more value than many sparrows, but of more value than the material universe; and would be an infinite loser were he to gain the whole world and lose his own soul.

But if the disciples, as *men*, were so valuable, how much more were they so as *Christians*, under which relation and character he viewed them! Thus they were not only superior to all other species of creatures, but to their own. Christians are the excellent of the earth, and whatever their outward circumstances may be, are more excellent than their neighbours. The world knoweth them not, but they are princes in disguise; they are ransomed with a price of infinite value; they are the temples of the living God; they are partakers of the divine nature: and of such importance are they, that they cannot be spared from any place without danger and detriment; they have power with God; they are the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof; they are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world—Their value is indescribable.

And they may without pride be conscious of this; and our Lord would have his disciples feel confidence as the result of it—"Fear ye not, *therefore*, ye are of more *value* than many sparrows." There were two fears which this consideration was designed and adapted to prevent. The first regarded their defence. In proportion as things are valuable, we are concerned to secure them. And will not God preserve those who are precious in his sight! They were going forth as lambs among wolves; and would be hated of all men for his Name's sake. Yet they were to be safe in all their dangers: their enemies could do nothing against them without Divine permission; and if they suffered, they were to be more than indemnified. A sparrow cannot be destroyed or injured without his providence; and shall you! "Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

The second regarded their support. "Provide," said he, "neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves." Yet you need not dread want. He who employs you will supply you. Does he suffer any of his creatures to famish? It is pleasing to contemplate his care; to see how he sustains the various classes of animals, especially in the more dreary parts of the year. Some for months he lulls to sleep. He reduces the appetites of others, or changes their food. The more domestic and useful, he supports by the instrumentality of man. How, when viewing the foddering of cattle, have I said, "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season!—And shall they that seek the Lord want any good thing? Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Christians! be not fearful, but believing. Your Lord and Saviour is concerned for your safety and welfare. He would have you careful for nothing, but casting all your care upon him that careth for you, go on your way rejoicing.

FEBRUARY 14.

"*Felix trembled.*"—Acts xxiv. 25.

"Felix trembled"—not *Paul*. Yet Felix was the judge, and Paul the prisoner. But the prisoner was not guilty. Though he suffered as an evil-doer even unto bonds, he had a conscience void of offence; and knew that he was suffering in the best of all causes, and for the most excellent of all masters. Therefore none of these things moved him. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear. The audience might have intimidated him. It was a trying thing to speak be-

fore persons of such reputation, and rank, and influence, as Tertullian the orator, Felix the Roman governor, Drusilla his wife, and other individuals of quality, whom the occasion had drawn together. Yet he trembled not; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. Creatures are all reduced to their proper level, when by faith we realize the presence and the eye of God. The fear of man would have brought a snare. It would have subdued or restrained his fidelity. And as Ahab's four hundred chaplains, when called in before the king, addressed themselves to his vanity, and only flattered him, so Paul would have endeavored to ingratiate himself with those who had power over him; or at least, have studiously avoided whatever would tend to make them feel unpleasantly. But what was the nature and manner of his address! He was acquainted with the characters of those before him. He knew Felix was cruel and oppressive. He knew that he was addicted to bribery and corruption in his office. He knew that he was living in adultery; for this Drusilla now united to him, had been seduced by him from her own husband Azigus. And what does he? He not only gives his views of the faith in Christ doctrinally, but he applies them practically. He reasons of righteousness; and shows that there is such a thing as justice between man and man. He reasons of temperance; and shows the evils of unbridled appetites and passions. He reasons of judgment to come; and shows the awfulness of that day when the great as well as the small will stand before an impartial tribunal, and whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Yet *he* does not tremble. Wherefore! He has truth on his side. He has God on his side. He has nothing to do with consequences; but by manifestation of the truth commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. "Such a man," said James the Sixth, "always preaches before me as if death stood at his elbow." It does really stand at the elbow of every minister; and therefore he should be able to use the words of Baxter:

> "I preach as if I ne'er should preach again;
> And as a dying man, to dying men."

"Felix trembled"—not *Drusilla*. He was a Pagan; she was a Jewess; and had even induced her former husband to submit to the rite of circumcision, as the condition of her marrying him. She therefore seemed more likely to be affected than Felix. How was it she escaped, and left all the emotion to him! Was her insensibility derived from the thought of her Jewish extraction and privileges! We should have deemed this impossible; but we know that the Jews, when they were most wicked, emboldened and encouraged themselves by this consideration. You steal, says God by Jeremiah, and murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and bear incense unto Baal; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my Name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations; yet they trusted in lying words, and said, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are we. Severely as John censured many of those who came to his baptism, he knew under all their iniquity they were saying in themselves, We have Abraham to our father. But Abraham calls the rich man in hell his son: and God says, I will punish the circumcised with the uncircumcised. The unconcern of Drusilla is rather to be traced to these two things. She had been accustomed to these subjects. Though they were novel to Felix, they were not new to her. The noise of the waterfall that almost deafens strangers, does not even prevent the sleep of those who reside near it. The sparks do not terrify the animal that lies hard by the anvil. Familiarity with divine things takes off from the power of their impression, and exceedingly tends to harden the heart they have not softened. Hence it is that many in our assemblies now hear, hardly awake, those awful truths which once alarmed themselves, and now make others tremble. She had also sinned under greater obligation, and against clearer light; and it is natural for such to wax worse and worse. Having known the way of righteousness, and turning from it, they became tenfold more the children of hell than before. Their peculiar guilt provokes the displeasure of God, and he judicially and generally gives them up to strong delusion, and to their own hearts' lusts; and withholding the influence that can alone render means effectual, and withdrawing his restraining grace, he says of them as he did of Ephraim, "they are joined to idols, let them alone."

How serious is the state of many of the children of the kingdom! We have more hope of those that come from the east and from the west. The first shall be last, and the last first.

FEBRUARY 15.

"*Felix trembled.*"—Acts xxiv. 25.

"Felix trembled"—See the vanity of worldly greatness. We can judge very little of persons by their outward circumstances. As "the mind is the standard of the *man*;" so it is the standard of his *state*, as to happiness or misery. Had we seen a prisoner in chains, and a governor on the bench, we should have been disposed to pity the one, and envy the other. Yet had we known all, our pity and our envy would have changed sides: for we should have found the prisoner possessed of the peace of God which passeth all understanding; while the governor was de

voured by anxiety and fear, notwithstanding his office, his rank, his authority, wealth and luxury—Felix trembled.

"Felix trembled"—See the power of conscience. Conscience is a bosom friend, or a bosom fury. It is God's vicegerent on earth; his tribunal within; the quarter sessions before the grand assize. Paul speaks of "the conscience bearing witness, and the thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Is this principle ever entirely suppressed? Some have boasted of the attainment. But there is a difference between pretensions and reality. What are men—not in company, but alone? Whence their dislike and dread of solitude? What are men—not in life, but in death? "Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die." Yet even in life, how hard is it to resist particular apprehensions! And apprehensions which cannot be ascribed to the danger of human detection, or punishment, because there is no fear of either. As the winter-frozen serpent seems lifeless, but is only benumbed, and when brought to the fire, again feels and uncoils, and stings: so, when conscience is asleep, it is not dead. And it is easily awakened by a particular reflection: the sight of a funeral, or sudden death, or a threatening sickness. The wicked, though not always actually in it, are all their lifetime *subject* to bondage, through fear of death. Madame de Stael observes, that misfortune has the power to make the strongest minds superstitious. It would be better to say, it has a tendency to revive a belief of a moral Providence, and to remind us of the connexion there is between sin and suffering. We see this in Jacob's sons when in the ward: there seemed to be nothing to lead them to think of Joseph, yet "they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." So Belshazzar's knees smote one against another when he saw, in the midst of his feast, the handwriting on the wall. The inscription was unintelligible: it might therefore have contained something favourable to him: but guilt was the interpreter. Herod, hearing of our Lord's fame, said, It is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and mighty works do show forth themselves in him. If, as Josephus says, he was a Sadducee, he denied the existence of spirits and the resurrection of the body—But his conscience was too strong for his creed.

"Felix trembled"—See the energy of divine truth. The word of God is called "a hammer," and "a fire;" and is said to be quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The noblest instance of its efficacy is when it is the power of God to salvation. But where it does not work effectually, as in them that believe, it often produces great effects for the time. Many were astonished at our Saviour's doctrine, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his lips. The stony ground hearers heard the word with joy, and endured for a while. Herod revered John, heard him gladly, and did many things; performing various duties, and breaking off from some of his vices. We little imagine, when the Gospel is plainly and faithfully preached, what feelings are excited even in natural men, and which will serve to render them inexcusable. For they that preach the truth as it is in Jesus, have a witness even in the experience of the unconverted. When these come from curiosity, or to ridicule, and are made to tremble; when they have forced upon them a remembrance of their sins, as if the preacher had been privy to all they have said or done; when the very secrets of their hearts are made manifest; when, notwithstanding their self-love, the doctrine makes them dissatisfied and uneasy with themselves; when they cannot but own secretly the necessity of the change they strive to deny or ridicule; and when, though offended and determined to go no more, they cannot but be found again and again in the assembly—What is this but a voucher of the divinity of their mission? and a testimony which God gives to the word of his grace?

"Felix trembled"—See the deceitfulness of the human heart. If what Paul said was not true and important, why did he tremble? If it was, why did he tremble only? Why did he not follow out his conviction? Yea, why did he endeavour to get rid of it?—But what does he? he has recourse to *delay*—"Go thy way for *this* time." This is the common device of Satan, and ruin of souls. It is not positive refusal, but putting off the thing for the present. Then he pleads another frequent delusion, *engagement*—"when I have a more *convenient* season, I will send for thee." A more free and leisure period to attend to the things of the soul is not likely to be found as we advance further in life and get more into the world. Yet suppose it *could* arrive—It *did* arrive to Felix. But the opportunity came without the disposition. He saw the preacher, but said nothing about the faith in Christ now. He saw him frequently, but no trembling now.—The good feeling was gone for ever! "He hoped that money should have been given him," and, disappointed in his avarice, and "willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." Behold another deception. If men reach what they have looked forward to as the most favoured period, they are not the same they once were. They are less disposed to that which is good and has been disregarded

so long. Evil propensities have grown by continuance. The disease has gained strength by neglect; and the shrub by being left has become a tree, and is too radicated to be removed.

Bless God if you tremble at his word; but remember, conviction is not conversion. Depend not on excitement in religion, without principle. Pray that you may tremble to purpose. Let your fear induce you to flee for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before you. Beware of losing your burden on the wrong side of the hill. Lay it down nowhere but at the feet of him who cries, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

FEBRUARY 16.

"*Ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*"—Heb. x. 34.

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbours. He is above them in character, in condition, and in prospect. He is more happy; more wise; more honourable; more free; more safe; more affluent. He has much in hand; but he has far more in hope. Hence says the Apostle to these Hebrews, "Ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." But

How came Christians to be possessed of property? They were originally destitute; they were by nature poor even as others. For a time indeed they were proudly deluded, and said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." But when they were brought to a knowledge of themselves, they confessed with Paul, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." And they also now acknowledge, that whatever they have gained has not been earned by their exertions, or procured by their worthiness; but was provided for them by another, even by him who said, "I will cause them that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasure." And the way ye know. Yes Christians, ye "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Here you see the liberality of his design—It was not only to relieve you, but to enrich; not only to clothe you, but to adorn; not only to draw you from the dust and the dunghill, but to set you among princes, even the princes of his people. And now all things are yours. You also see the expensiveness of the medium—It is through his poverty you are enriched. He was in the form of God: but in this form he could not be your redeemer, your sacrifice, your sympathising friend, your example in duty and suffering. He therefore "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Thus he abased himself that we might be exalted, and emptied himself of his glory that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. And if such a medium was expedient and necessary, (and the fact itself is the proof) what an idea must we attach to the greatness and difficulty of our salvation! and what ought we to think of the Saviour's "grace!"

> "He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
> To raise us to his throne;
> There's not a gift his hand bestows,
> But costs his heart a groan."

But let us examine the wealth of his people. It is substance characterized by three things.

By its residence. It is substance *in heaven*—The abode of the glorified, the habitation of angels, the dwelling-place of God himself. Whether this is either of the shining worlds over us, or any other invisible to the eye, we cannot determine. But said Jesus, "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Since he is there, our hope is said to be laid up for us in heaven; for we are blessed with all spiritual blessings "in heavenly places in Christ." And no wonder we have our conversation in heaven: for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

By its pre-eminence—It is *better* substance. Better than what? Better than the goods which the Hebrews had lost; and of which the Apostle speaks in the words immediately preceding: "ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods." He allows that the things of which they had been deprived were *good* in themselves, though often abused. But he says, this substance is better. Better in its nature. It is spiritual; and so suited to the wants of the soul. Better in enjoyment. It yields satisfaction; while as to worldly wealth, a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses; and in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits. Better in acquisition. Worldly riches are commonly the mammon of unrighteousness. Few acquire them without some moral injury or degradation. He that maketh haste to be rich, saith Solomon, shall not be innocent; and Paul says, "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced

themselves through with many sorrows." But in the pursuit of this substance there is no need of meanness and hypocrisy, of running down others, of hating rivals, of wishing people dead. The love of this wealth refines, enlarges, elevates, and ennobles the possessor, and does this in the same degree in which he is covetous after it.

By its permanency—It is *enduring* substance. This is an attribute that attaches to nothing here. Riches make to themselves wings and flee away. They are therefore called "uncertain riches." They are destructive in themselves, and they are liable to a thousand outward disasters; storms, floods, fires, war, wicked and unreasonable men, buyers who never mean to pay, and borrowers who never mean to restore. Hence the exhortation of our Saviour: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Here then are durable riches with righteousness. There is in them no principle of decay; and they are safe from external invasion and injury. A Christian therefore does not feel like men of the world, who have their portion in this life. *They* are alarmed and miserable at the changes which endanger "all the happiness they know." But the Christian is calm, and his soul dwells at ease, because whatever befalls him, he knows his treasure is secure; independent of the body and its diseases, the world and its revolutions, time and its vicissitudes. The heavens may pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, may be burnt up—but he is no loser even then—"For, according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

> "All, all on earth is shadow; all beyond
> Is substance—The reverse is folly's creed.
> How solid all where change shall be no more!"

"So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

FEBRUARY 17.

"*Now, there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*"—Acts xiii. 1.

THERE were no less than sixteen Antiochs in Western Asia, founded in honour of Antiochus, by Seleucus Nicator his son. The Scripture only mentions two of them. The first was the capital of Pisidia; the second, the capital of Syria. The text alludes to the latter of these. Its situation, extent, honours, riches, trade, and the freedom and privileges the Jews enjoyed in it, may be easily ascertained from history. We have other things to notice. The most important fact ever connected with it was the arrival of the Gospel. This was occasioned by the persecution that arose about Stephen; for some of those who were scattered by that event reached so far, and there preached the Lord Jesus. "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." There has been much dispute here; and it is not perhaps possible to determine, whether this name was imposed by way of reproach, or by a divine intimation. But the name was obviously derived from the Founder of Christianity; and we wish his followers had never been called by any other.

God has his set places, as well as times, in which to favour Zion. This church at Antioch, though of recent formation, flourished abundantly; and was remarkable for members and ministers. There were in it "certain prophets and teachers." Do these signify two classes of officers? or the same men exercising two functions? that is, not only preaching the word but occasionally foretelling events?

Five of them are here mentioned by name. First, Barnabas. He was a Levite of Cyprus; a man of property: but who sold his estate, and threw the money into the common stock. He was first called Joses, but afterwards Barnabas; which signifies the son of consolation: because he refreshed the bowels of the poor, was tender in his disposition, and preached affectionately. He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost; and the father of many converts.

The second was "Simeon, that was called Niger." This must regard his complexion. He was probably a negro. We trust he was; for we love every thing that sheds a ray of comfort, honour, or hope over that sinfully degraded race of our brethren—if some will allow us to call them so. If not, he was a man of very dark and swarthy colour. Many a fair and beautiful form has enshrined a truly ugly mind. And on the other hand, a lovely soul has sometimes inhabited an ungracious body. Let us learn to value intellectual and

moral qualities above corporeal—"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without discretion." "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

The third is "Lucius of Cyrene." Of him we know nothing more, except his being mentioned by the Apostle among his saluted friends, in the close of the epistle to the Romans: "Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you." Some have thought whether he was not Luke the physician and Evangelist, and the writer of this book.

The fourth was "Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch." This Herod was not Herod the Great, who massacred the infants in Bethlehem, but his son. To him Manaen was foster-brother; that is, he was the son of his nurse; and therefore in his infancy, reared along with him. Let us not pass this slightly over. What different courses do men take who were once in the same condition! Here we see Herod and Manaen, brought up together in the same house: the one becoming a profligate, a persecutor, the actual murderer of James, and the intentional murderer of Peter, awfully ending his course, being smitten of an angel of the Lord, and eaten of worms; the other becoming a disciple of Jesus, and a preacher of the Gospel—So diverse were the characters of these two individuals, brought up together, playing in the same room, hearing the same voices, and surrounded with the same examples, during the most impressive period of life! Why did Herod reject Christianity? and why did Manaen embrace it? The one was perfectly inexcusable; the other had no reason to be proud, but much reason to be thankful. Men destroy themselves, and will feel guilty in their ruin. But by grace are we saved. The Lord makes us to differ from others; and we have nothing but what we have received.

Manaen therefore was a person of some distinction and quality; and had probably renounced considerable worldly advantage for the sake of religion. Had he joined with his young and royal companion in sin, he might it is likely have gained a place under government, as every kind and degree of relationship is provided for in such cases at the expense of the public; but he resembled Moses, who when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And was he a loser? He *could* not be a loser. The lips of Truth have said, "There is no man that hath left houses, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

God generally chooses the poor of this world to be rich in faith. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But there have been always a few; and we should be thankful when we meet with such instances: for though their souls are no more precious than the souls of the vulgar, they are so placed and circumstanced as to be able to be more serviceable in their generation. Thus, as Manaen was a man of education and address, these advantages were now sanctified; and he was therefore immediately and advantageously employed.

The fifth was "Saul;" a character endeared to us as the Apostle of the Gentiles; and one of the most extraordinary individuals recorded in history. We know much concerning him; much from his own writings; and much from the narratives of Luke. When we consider his pharisaism, his persecutions of the Church, his conversion, his zeal, his journeys, sufferings, and services, we readily join him in the acknowledgement: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant to me ward." And we glorify God in him. What an assortment! What an assemblage was here!

FEBRUARY 18.

"*And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.*"—Gen. xxx. 27.

Laban knew and acknowledged the true God, yet had idols in his family. His character was a compound of selfishness, cunning, meanness, and cruelty. He even turned his daughters into articles of traffic; and inveigled his son-in-law into discord and wretchedness, polygamy and incest. All this is perfectly credible; for he was *covetous;* and "the love of money is the root of all evil." He is here addressing Jacob, who after serving him with diligence and fidelity for many years, and meeting only with injury and insult, resolved to leave him. The resolution was not the effect of feeling only, but of divine command; for the Lord "had said unto him, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." At the thought of losing such a prize, "Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." Whence we remark,—

That God is the author of all our successes and comforts. Even Laban owns this—"*The Lord* has blessed me." No wonder therefore Solomon should say, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich." Moses gives Israel the admonition, "Thou shalt remember

the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth." Yet they soon forgot and drew upon themselves the reflection, "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider." "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." Let us beware of this, and not sacrifice unto our net, and burn incense unto our drag, because *by* them our portion is fat, and our meat plenteous.

God may bless a bad man—The Lord hath blessed *me*, says Laban. He maketh his sun to rise upon the evil, as well as upon the good; and sendeth rain, not only upon the just, but upon the unjust. If we look over their gardens and fields, we shall not be able to distinguish by their fertility or barrenness those which pertain to the friends or the enemies of God. "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." "The sure mercies of David," are peculiarly appropriated; but the good things of Providence are bestowed indiscriminately. God may heal the bodies of those whose souls are not saved: and he may elevate in life, those who have no inheritance among them that are sanctified. Yea, the wicked often prosper in the world beyond others, and have more than heart can wish. This will not perplex us when we understand their end, and see in what slippery places they are set. Who envies the ox that is fattening for the slaughter in the greenest pasture? Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, and the glory of his house is increased. Do not imagine that God approves of you because he bears with you, and even indulges your desires. Pray for the favour which he bears to his people; for the heritage of those that fear his Name.

God blesses some for the sake of others—"The Lord hath blessed me for *thy* sake." See another instance of this in the case of Potiphar. "And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field." Upon this principle Moses pleaded: "Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin." And when Jerusalem was besieged, God said, "For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." We are bound to religion, not only by personal, but also by relative considerations. We are in a sense responsible for others as well as for ourselves. We can injure or benefit those with whom we are connected. One sinner destroyeth much good, while the godly are blessings to all around them. How much should we value such benefactors! They are the light of the world; the salt of the earth; the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof. They stand in the gap, and hold back invading judgments. They are the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. "Thus saith the Lord, as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.

Persons may derive advantage from their inferiors. The stream of goodness and usefulness seems naturally to run downwards: but here the less is not blessed of the greater; but the elder of the younger; the master of the servant. None are independent of others. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those parts of the body which seem to be most feeble are necessary. The king is served by the labour of the field. Parents have derived spiritual life from their children. Ministers may learn from those they are appointed to teach: and Christians superior in circumstances, may be improved by those who though poor in this world, are rich in faith, and deeply versed in the things of God. A little captive girl was the instrument of making the God of Israel to be honoured in Syria, and of obtaining a miraculous cure for her master—Call nothing common or unclean.

Men, however irreligious, are sometimes constrained to bear testimony in favour of the godly. Laban, who disliked Jacob, and would have injured him had he not been divinely restrained, cannot avoid thus honouring and extolling him—"If I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." Balaam had no love for Israel, and died fighting against them; yet exclaimed, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Such a difference is there between belief and practice; conviction and disposition. So men hold the truth in unrighteousness. So they own the reality of the conversion, and "gaze and admire and hate the change." When Saul was spared by David, he could not help lifting up his voice and weeping and crying, "Thou art more righteous than I." When Christians act consistently, they enthrone themselves in the minds of their observers; and though their enemies may outwardly reproach them, they cannot but inwardly revere. They may dislike the nature of religion, but they can judge of its moral and relative advantages. The difference between the partakers of divine grace and others, in their conduct and their condition, is too great and obvious to elude notice. "Their

seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."

FEBRUARY 19.

"*I John am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.*"—Rev. i. 9.

By calling himself their "brother," John shows how well he remembered the admonition of his Lord and Saviour: "Be not ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." The first ministers of the Gospel never thought of "lording it over God's heritage, but were ensamples to the flock." "We have no dominion," said they to their hearers, "over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand." Every man is a brother: but the name is peculiarly applied to the subjects of divine grace. Whatever differences prevail among these, they are only the distinctions of children—they are all of the same family—the same household of faith—and to claim kindred with them, is the supreme desire of every one who is a child of light. John valued his relation as a Christian more than his office and endowments as an Apostle. He might have been an Apostle, and have perished. Judas was an Apostle; yet he hanged himself, and went to his own place. But "he that believeth hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation." So much better is it to pray than to prophesy; and to have our names written in heaven, than have the spirits subject unto us.

When he speaks of his being their "companion," he does not mean what we might at first suppose—one who had free and familiar intercourse with them: from this he was now debarred, being banished to the Isle of Patmos. As we need and are formed for society, and as religion sanctifies the social principle, Christians love the presence and conversation of each other. "My goodness," says David, "extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and the excellent in whom is all my delight. I am a companion of all them that fear thee." Their intercourse with each other is instructive, and relieving, and enlivening. Solomon compares it to the refreshment of ointment and perfume; and to the mutual sharpening of instruments. Yet some are entirely denied this privilege; and are placed in neighbourhoods and families where they can have no sweet counsel together, or go to the throne and the house of the Lord in company. Others lament the little access they have to those whom they most love and esteem. So it is—as if God would wean us from hence, and make us long for the general assembly, where, in heaven, we shall enjoy the fellowship forbidden us on earth. In the mean time, as a substitute, we can be present in spirit, and now and then peruse the welcome epistle, and be thankful that we are joint-sharers in all their rights and blessings in "the communion of saints." But John means, that he was a fellow-partaker with them—In what? "Your companion," says he, "in tribulation; and in the kingdom; and patience of Jesus Christ." A just and striking representation of the state of Christians while in this world.

They are called to *suffer:* and many are the afflictions of the righteous. But never imagine you are alone in your trials. The same things have happened to your brethren. See your companions—"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth *every* son whom he receiveth."

But if you suffer, you are also called to *reign:* and are receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved; the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour; a kingdom not of this world, but infinitely surpassing all the glories of time and sense.

Hence *patience* is indispensable. It is necessary to both the former; to the tribulation—to bear it: and to the kingdom—to wait for it. For though you are already entitled and anointed, you are not yet actually crowned; but resemble David, who, after much tribulation and years of hope, entered his kingdom.

FEBRUARY 20.

"*Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.*"—Psalm xxvii. 11.

David had enemies. So has every Christian. And perhaps we should have more if we more fully resembled *Him*, who said to the Jews, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify that its deeds are evil."

But the margin reads, "because of mine observers." Let us see who these observers are, and how concerned we should be to walk properly, having so many watchers over us, and many of them regarding us with no friendly mind.

The world are observers, and they mark us with a keen and malignant eye. When David had slain Goliath, and drawn forth the gratitude of his countrymen, it is said, "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." And it is also said, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him." How well if it had been always so! At length he yielded to temptation, and one of the effects which he had to mourn over all his days, was the triumph he gave to his adversaries. Thou hast caused, said Nathan, the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. To

blaspheme here means, to speak reproachfully against his God, his religion, and his experience. So Paul says, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." Wonder not that this is addressed to servants and even slaves; for, professing Christianity as they did, they were able to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, or disgrace it. Let us remember that we have many lookers on who watch, not to find something to admire, but for our halting. And they are not so ignorant as we sometimes imagine. They know generally what we profess, and they know what line of conduct becomes us; and if we act inconsistently with it, they will be sure to despise us. But if we are inflexible, and follow out our principles, and are always and everywhere the same, we shall commend ourselves to their consciences, and they will be constrained to respect those to whom they cannot be attached. What a noble testimony was borne to Daniel, when his accusers said they could find nothing against him, unless in matters pertaining to the law of his God! Some do not mind what people say of them: but they ought to mind. "Ought ye not," said Nehemiah, "to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" And says Peter, "So is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." "Avoid," says Paul, "the very appearance of evil."

Saints are our observers. They observe us from love; and a sense of duty. They are commanded not only to "admonish," and "exhort," but to "consider one another"—not curiously, but to warn; and rebuke; and restore; and to provoke to love and good works. Woe to those who shall offend one of God's little ones! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he thrown into the depth of the sea. Let us be careful, even if they are ignorant and infirm, not to offend against the generation of the upright. Let us make strait paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Ministers are our observers. They are to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. When we act unworthy our calling, their minds are perplexed, their hearts are discouraged, and their hands are slackened. But they live when we stand fast in the Lord. They can refer to us, when our conversation becomes the Gospel, as arguments, proofs, and commendations; and we are their glory and joy.

Angels observe us. We are a spectacle to angels, as well as to the world and to men. And Paul charges Timothy, not only before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but also the elect angels, to do nothing by partiality. They are therefore witnesses of our conduct, and can see us, though we cannot see them. When persons are tried, witnesses are called in to depose. So will it be at the day of judgment. Parents will be called upon to testify against their children; and ministers against their hearers. Angels also will be employed. Some sins, and the temptations leading to them, are unknown to all human beings but the parties themselves. And these accuse each other. And who is to determine which is the seducer, and which only the seduced?

Above all, God observes us. He is the most perfect observer, for nothing eludes him; he seeth our thoughts afar off. He is also the most concerned observer: they are his laws which are violated or honoured by our temper and conduct; and he records all we speak and do; and will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. Therefore said he to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." And what manner of persons should we be, if we believed and considered that he was always looking upon us!

Let us remember therefore that we are never in secret, but always acting on a stage. We are observed by foes, by friends, by men, by angels, and by God the judge of all. Surely we need wisdom, and strength, far above our own. Lord, be our guide and our guard, even unto death.

FEBRUARY 21.

"*And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*"—Acts vi. 15.

There was nothing unaccountable in their beholding him as they did. He was a remarkable character; and had excited much notice by his office, and the wonders and miracles which he did among the people, and the victory he had gained over a number of able opponents who had challenged him to the dispute. He also now appeared, upon his trial, under some heinous accusations. When a prisoner enters a court, every eye is naturally drawn towards him; and the judge and the jury frequently observe his countenance, as a kind of index of his conscious innocency or guilt. *All* that sat in the council looked *stedfastly* on Stephen, wishing and hoping, perhaps, to gaze him into confusion and tremor. But he could bear looking at—They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. But filled with envy and malice and fury, grinning horribly, and gnashing upon him with their teeth; how did *their* faces appear? What a contrast between him and his persecutors! Here was a lamb among wolves, an angel before devils, and the High Priest the chief of the devils!

"They saw his face as it had been the face

of an angel." But how could they tell what an angel's face was? They had never seen one. Angels had indeed formerly appeared to men: and many instances of it are recorded. But as the design of the Scripture is to edify, and not to amuse, it tells us little concerning these beings. Yet all it relates goes to establish one thing—their superiority to the human race. Thus we read that man was made a little lower than the angels. They are spoken of as flying very swiftly. They are said to excel in strength. To be exceedingly wise, is to be wise as an angel of God. The glory of their appearance was such as commonly to overpower the senses of those to whom they were sent. At the sight of Gabriel, Daniel's comeliness was turned into corruption, and he retained no strength. The human voice is a wonderful instrument; and we find what it can achieve in singing and eloquence. Yet Paul speaks not only of the tongues of men, but of angels: and it would seem that one of these is to awaken the dead; the voice of the archangel is the trump of God. A human countenance is an astonishing display of perfection: yet it is intimated that the face of an angel is much more so. These celestial beings are the flower of the creation; and from our inferiority to them, we see more fully the excellency of God's power, in putting the treasure into earthen vessels, and employing as ministers men, and not angels—The vastness of the Christian's obligation, who is raised from his low estate, and placed above these angels in blessedness and glory—The humility and kindness of these angels, that though now so much higher than we, they are all our ministering spirits, and despise not even our little ones—And, far more still, the grace and condescension of the Lord Jesus, who took not on him the nature of angels, but was made in the likeness of men; and because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, also took part of the same.

But what was the nature of this appearance in the face of Stephen? and how is it to be accounted for? The visage is sometimes very impressive and striking by natural beauty. There is nothing in the world so admirable as "the human face divine." How greatly does it display the workmanship of the Creator, and how often has it been the instrument of his providence in effecting great designs! How much depended upon the life of Moses! But he was hid three months because he was a goodly child. Daniel and his three companions were preferred because they were well formed and there was no blemish in them. Esther was an orphan, supported by her uncle, with no dowry but her charms: yet she becomes the saviour of Israel, and the queen of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

The face is rendered powerful and striking by intellectual qualities. The former may be found without these; but the features, however fine and regular, will be tame and insipid, unless something of *mind* beams through; and the countenance will only captivate fools and sensualists. "Wisdom," says Solomon, "maketh the face to shine." What expression is there in the looks of some speakers when they are animated and lighted up! Much of the force of Lord Chatham's eloquence arose from the fire of his eye, and the majesty of his features.

The face is rendered interesting and striking by social and moral attributes. These constitute the chief grace, the principal charm. It is of these we think when we conceive of our Lord in the days of his flesh, and by which alone perhaps he was personally fairer than the children of men. We imagine his face beaming with peace, gentleness, compassion, kindness, readiness to pardon and relieve, the image of the invisible God who is love. How is a countenance injured by the want of humility, modesty, diffidence, tenderness! How lovely are infants while insensible of their cherub charms! How lovely is youth while they are unconscious of their attractions, and full of innocency and simplicity, and devoid of design and attempt—for the impression is gone when the wearer is perceived to be acting upon it; and study, art, and decoration are employed and managed as substitutes and expedients. What difference is there between two countenances, one of which is inhabited by vice and bad humour, and the other by goodness and amiable temper! How angelic does one man look! How rude, tyrannical, insolent, unfeeling, and cruel another! How desirable is it that persons should be religious early, while the face is susceptible of impression and improvement, and the features may be modified by its benign and heavenly influences! When they are older, a change of character cannot change the countenance; and if envy and malignity, and pride, and disdain have ruled in it before, they will leave deep and dismal traces for life. Religion, we are persuaded, is not only "the health of the countenance," but the comeliness too!

But when Stephen's face was seen as it had been the face of an angel, was the aspect natural, or supernatural? He might have had a corporeal loveliness. We know he was at this time full of wisdom and faith. His countenance was not pallid with guilt, nor distracted by care, nor troubled with fear, but full of confidence, serenity, mildness and joy. Yet there was something supernatural here. And why should this be deemed incredible, or even wonderful? The occasion was worthy a divine interposition. It was an age of miracles. A few hours afterwards, Stephen said, I see the heaven opened, and

Jesus standing on the right hand of God. In the transfiguration, as he prayed, the fashion of his Saviour's countenance was changed, and his raiment was white and glistering. It is said of Moses too, as he came down from the mount, that his face shone so that the Israelites could not behold him for the glory of his countenance. And how remarkable was it, that at the very moment Stephen was accused of being an enemy to Moses, God should have honoured him in the very same way, shedding a radiance upon him that might serve to remind them, and perhaps did remind them, of the illustrious legislator himself!

FEBRUARY 22.

"*And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*"—Acts vi. 15.

The design of the Lord in this appearance was to distinguish and dignify his servant. He saves and pardons sovereignly; but he administers honour according to a rule which he has himself laid down: "Them that honour me, I will honour." Enoch was translated that he should not see death; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. "Come thou and all thy house into the ark," said God to Noah, "for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." Stephen was not ashamed of the Redeemer. He went forth to him without the camp, cheerfully bearing his reproach; and was determined that Christ should be magnified in his body whether by life or by death—and the Lord stood by him, confessing him before men, and putting a visible glory upon him. We are not to look for miracles, wonders, and signs: but the Lord has not forsaken the earth; and the promise is still true, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." And he cannot be at a loss for means to do this, not only beyond the grave, but through life. There is a moral glory in their character and conversation, which shows that they have been with Jesus. It adorns the doctrine of God their Saviour; inspires beholders with reverence and awe; and more than puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He whom they serve has often brought their enemies to their feet; and put such a difference between his people and the Egyptians as to constrain the most unthinking to say, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth." When they have suffered, especially for his Name's sake, "the Spirit of glory and of God has rested upon them." And how has he owned them in their last hours! A radiance has been thrown around them that has rendered the dying chamber the house of God and the gate of heaven; and induced the exclamation from all beholders, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"—What then is the glory that shall be revealed in them, when he shall change even the vile body of his people, and fashion it like unto his own glorious body; and they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

We here see the truth and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, and how worthy he is of our confidence. He had said to his disciples: "They will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues: but when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.' "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." And did not Stephen find it so? Perhaps he had his fears previously to his appearance in the council. Nothing is more intimidating than to appear before lawyers, magistrates and judges. Many well know how they felt when they had to enter a court only to give evidence, and when they had persons to introduce and support them. But Stephen was alone and unbefriended, and his judges were filled with hatred and fury. Yet he had a reasonable and an adequate relief to rely upon; and he found the assurance true; and was perhaps astonished at his own self-possession, and force of argument, and promptness of recollection, and fluency of words. Yea, more was done than was engaged for. The promise only regarded the tongue, not the face; only how they should *speak*, not how they should *look*—but behold an irradiation of countenance that draws and fixes every eye—"All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face AS IT HAD BEEN THE FACE OF AN ANGEL." The Lord is never worse, but he is frequently better than his word. Though his promises are exceeding great as well as precious, they do not exhaust all the love of his heart, or power of his arm. He has yet reserves for extraordinary purposes; and indulges, and surprises. He loves to exceed expectation; and do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

What was the effect of this scene? With regard to Stephen, it does not appear that he was aware of it himself. This too was the case with Moses in a similar distinction. He knew not that his face shone, till he saw the Israelites were dazzled, and he was obliged to take a veil and soften the lustre. Good men are not the first to discover their excellences: nor are they forward to publish them. But from others they cannot be concealed: their profiting will appear unto all men. Though Stephen was unconscious of the honour, none of the council were ignorant of

it; *all* looked stedfastly, and *saw* his face as it had been the face of an angel. And how were they all affected! They were enraged the more: and "*then* said the High Priest, Are these things so?" What a proof was this of the perverseness and impenitency of these men, that they could go on, and persecute to the death, a man whom God himself was honouring before their eyes! But it is a fact every way instructive. It shows the truth of the declaration, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It shows that all belief is not, as some say, influential. It ought to be so, and would be so if we were in a right state: but we are fallen creatures; and the powers of the soul are thrown into disorder. Hence we see and approve better things, and follow worse; and the clearest convictions of the judgment are counteracted by our passions and appetites. We talk of the evils of ignorance: but while some are destroyed for lack of knowledge, others perish by the possession of it. To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin. Numbers, like these beholders of Stephen, derive from their opportunity and advantages only an increase of guilt and condemnation.

We talk of miracles. They were useful as evidences and proofs; but as moral means they failed as well as other means. We are ready to think that those who were not properly influenced by them, could not believe them: but they did believe them. The Pharisees believed our Lord's miracles, but feared to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. And we find the council at Jerusalem admitting fully the notable miracle that had been done upon the cripple: we cannot say they deny it—yet they apprehend, and beat, and imprison the doers of it, and command them to speak no more in the name of Jesus! Men pretend inability, when only inclination is wanting. They are not strangers to the truth, but hold it in unrighteousness; and will not let it go free in their conduct. They think their irreligion is the creature of circumstances; and that if they had other situations and conditions, they should be godly. Vain supposition! They are ready to wish some overpowering dispensation or calamity may befall them, that what is not done by conviction, may be done by impression; and what is not done by the means of grace, may be done by events. If one come unto us from the dead, we should repent. Vain hope! If you hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would you be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

FEBRUARY 23.

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."—Matthew xxviii. 20.

It is needless to ask who is the speaker? Every believer will exclaim, as soon as he hears the words, "It is the voice of my Beloved." *His* voice is always welcome to the ear of faith: welcome when it enjoins a duty; welcome when it demands a sacrifice—How welcome then when it announces that he will never leave us nor forsake us!

But we may ask, on what occasion he spoke? It was on the verge of glory, a few hours only before he entered the joy that was set before him. It was in the nature of a parting address. O, to have seen him! to have glanced at the features and emotions of his countenance just as he was ascending to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God! He could not go without something that should keep from despair even the minds of those who had crucified him. Preach, said he to his Apostles, repentance and remission of sins in my Name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.* Let those that smote the Rock, have the first offer of the stream! Tell those that shed it, that there is redemption in my blood, even the forgiveness of their sins! If such was his concern for enemies, what says he to encourage those who had forsaken all to follow him! No wonder sorrow had filled their hearts. How *we* feel at the loss of a dear relation, or beloved friend, or useful minister! *They* were as lambs among wolves. They were left in a world that hated and persecuted them. What will they do for defence, counsel, and comfort, when their defender, and counsellor, and comforter is gone! Ye shall see me again, says he—I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you—"Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. When you were on the lake, and a storm arose, and you seemed ready to perish, I awoke and rebuked the sea, and there was a great calm. When at another time the wind was contrary, and you rowed in vain, till your strength failed, I came at the fourth watch of the night, and immediately the ship was at the land whither ye went And when I sent you forth without purse, and scrip, and shoes, you had many anxieties and fears; but lacked ye any thing? In every want I will provide. The latest watch shall find me near. Every storm shall bring me in its bosom—Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

But how could this be! Did they live alway! Did they not all leave the world more than seventeen hundred years ago? He spake to them, not so much personally, as relatively and representatively. Had he intended themselves only, it would have been enough to say, I am with you alway, even to the end of life; but as he intended the Church whom he addressed in them, he says, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world. There is nothing unusual in such a mode of address. Speaking as Englishmen, we say,

things have been so and so with *us*, ever since the Reformation or Revolution. No river has the selfsame particles of water it had a year or an hour ago; yet because it flows in the same banks, and from the same sources, we always call it by the same name. The Church of Christ is one community, and the unity is not affected by the variety of parts, or succession of time. We look backward to the days of his flesh, and say, "*We* beheld his glory:" we look forward to his coming again, and say, "*We* shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

There is a world, the Lord prepared us for it! that will never terminate: but "this present world" is not only seen, but temporal—It will have an "end;" and we know it. We know not indeed when it shall take place; but we know that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." Then "time shall be no longer." But O delightful assurance! we know that *till then*, Jesus will be —must be—with his people. Yet how is the assurance to be understood? How can he be with them alway, even to the end of the world? O, say they who only counsel to cast him down from his excellency; by his word, and ordinances, and ministers. But he speaks of his presence: and he does not say, I *shall* be, but I *am* with you. Yet it could not be as to his bodily presence: for he said, "the poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always." "Now I am no more in the world:" and no more will he be corporeally in the world, till he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation. It is impossible to explain these things consistently, without the admission of his divinity. It is absurd to suppose that a mere creature could be always with millions of persons at the same time. A man, an angel, cannot be in two places at the same moment. Yet, even allowing his divinity, some distinction is necessary. His omnipresence is an essential attribute by which he fills heaven and earth, and thus he is as near to the wicked as to the righteous. When his presence is spoken of in a way of privilege, it must be distinguished from a perfection of his nature, and refer to the agency of his grace, or the influence of his Spirit. So he had explained himself to his disciples: "I will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

Let us realize this promise, as the promise of One that cannot lie. And while it fills us with wonder and admiration, and induces us to exclaim, "Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth?" let it induce us to seek the blessedness of a union with his people, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. And if we have reason to hope that we are in the number of his followers, let the promise establish our hearts with regard to the security of his Church, and the permanency and success of his cause. Let it animate us in every duty. Let it be a source of consolation in every trial. Are we reduced in circumstances? deserted? bereaved? looking into the valley of the shadow of death? Let us hear him saying, "Fear not; for I am with thee." And may we be enabled to answer—

> "If Thou, my Jesus, still art nigh,
> Cheerful I live, and cheerful die:
> Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
> To find ten thousand worlds in Thee."

FEBRUARY 24.

"*And he said, It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.*"—1 Sam. iii. 18.

Eli had many failings; but his behaviour on this occasion does him honour. Samuel had feared to show him the vision. But though Eli foreboded that it was against him, he adjured the young Levite to "hide nothing" from him. This was well. But it was better still when having heard "every whit," he exclaimed, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."

We need not push this resignation to every extent. Eli considers the message as a temporal judgment, designed to degrade his family from the priesthood, but not as necessarily consigning them all to endless perdition. Some of the mystics have carried the principle of submission so far as even to include their future destruction; and have said, "If thou send me to hell, I shall continue to praise and love thee." The thing is impossible. It is not in our power to love a being that without compensation would make us miserable. By the law of our nature we are bound to pursue our welfare and happiness: and our resignation to be lost for ever, if it were a possible feeling, would oppose the revealed pleasure of the Almighty, "who will have all men to be saved," and "commands us to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ" —Neither should we suppose that the state of Eli's mind at this time excluded sensibility. A man of his tenderness must have felt —and he ought to have felt—and he could have exercised no resignation without feeling. Our Saviour himself said, "Now is my soul troubled;" and he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;". and so may you, consistently with the most perfect submission, if you can add as he did: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

But Eli humbles himself under the mighty hand of God without murmuring and complaining. He does not accuse him of injustice or severity, but meekly accepts the dispensation—"It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Two things contributed to this. First, a sense of his guilt. He had connived at the conduct of his sons, and thereby had dishonoured religion, and offended God. This he felt, and therefore said, "why should a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sin?" "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Let the afflicted compare their sufferings with their guilt, and they will see that they have no right to repine: God has punished them less than their iniquities deserve. Secondly, a recognition of divine agency. Natural men live without God in the world. They do not perceive and acknowledge him in their successes and comforts, but sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag. And so in their disappointments and trials they exclaim, "It was that unfortunate event; it was that unlucky servant; it was that malicious neighbour; it was that perfidious friend"—But Eli says "It is the Lord," and therefore "let *him* do what seemeth him good." A man like-minded with Eli, does not stop at second causes; or think only of instruments. Instruments may inflict the injury, and we are not required to justify them in their conduct; but they could have no power against us unless it were given them from above. David did not excuse the malice and profaneness of Shimei, when he said, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." But he saw the providence of God in the permission and concurrence of the event. And is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it? Does not he make darkness as well as create light? Does not he wound as well as heal? And what can tend more to produce submission to his will than the sight of his hand? Therefore David said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, *because thou didst it*."—"It is the Lord," whose power is almighty, and who cannot be resisted. "It is the Lord," who has a sovereign propriety in us, and may do what he will with his own. "It is the Lord," who is righteous in all his works—shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? "It is the Lord," whose understanding is infinite, and whose wisdom is unerring. "It is the Lord," whose mercy endureth for ever; who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; who loves while he chastens, and chastens because he loves; who will be with us in trouble, to sustain, deliver, and sanctify us; and make all things work together for our good—The cup which *my Father* giveth me, shall I not drink it?—'Let HIM do what seemeth him good."

FEBRUARY 25.

"*Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord.*"—1 Sam. xxi. 7.

THIS fact is not without its usefulness. It shows us that in divine worship, we appear *before God*. We are indeed always in his view; and should continually impress our minds with Hagar's conviction, Thou God seest me. But he is in some places as he is not in others: and a peculiar presence of God belongs to the sanctuary. David believed this; and therefore, longing for the ordinances of his house, he exclaims, "When shall I come and appear before God?" And surely Christians have not less reason than Jews to expect the special presence of God in their assemblies. Has he not said, "In all places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee; and I will bless thee?" "For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them?" The tokens of his presence are less sensible under the Christian, than under the Jewish dispensation; but they are no less real. They saw the cloud of glory, and heard the answers from the mercy-seat. And we see the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple, and hear what he says concerning us. How often has he been found there, in his converting power, in his enlivening grace, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost! How often has he been known in his palaces for a refuge!

Again. We see that persons may attend the means of grace, not from inclination, but constraint. What brought Doeg to the tabernacle at this time,—whether it was to justify himself from some uncleanness, to perform a vow, or for any other purpose, we cannot determine: but he would rather have been elsewhere. He was not doing his own business, nor finding his own pleasure there—he was not at home there—not at ease there—He "was *detained* before the Lord"—as a bird is detained in a cage from the liberty he loves; or as a man is detained by complaisance in a party he dislikes; or as a traveller is detained under a shed from the rain, but longing to be gone. There is no judging of men fairly, unless you observe them when they act freely. It is said of Peter and John, that "being let go, they went to their own company." Unless he goes out of the world, the Christian must mix with others: but they are not his companions: he is a companion of all them that fear God; in them is all his delight. He does business with others, but he takes hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you. On the other hand, many things short of disposition may detain persons in

their attendance on the means of grace, and but for which we should see them no more in the house of God.

Some are detained by reputation. Though we are not a country of Christians, we are a Christian country; and though few feel the power, all comparatively respect the forms of godliness; and to abandon these, would excite remark and censure, even among the worldly and indifferent. Some also are influenced by their connexions: children by the authority of their parents; servants by the requisition of their masters; husbands by the importunity of their wives. Some, and this I fear is frequently the case in the upper ranks, are attendants for the sake of example; and to sanction the thing in the eyes of the common people, who *do* want religion, and cannot *well* be managed without it. Some are urged by the uneasiness of their minds, arising from conviction and fear. They feel no concern to please God, and have no desire to hold communion with him; but they want an opiate to allay the wakefulness of conscience. Some are attracted by a kind of entertainment which they find in the psalmody of the place, or the eloquence of the preacher. This was the case with Ezekiel's hearers: "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. If the Sabbath to some be not an irksome day, it is because they divert it from its sacred purposes—otherwise they would exclaim, What a weariness it is to serve the Lord! when will the Sabbath be gone? Yea, so irksome are religious exercises to some, that they feel perhaps more of the carnal mind that is enmity against God in their devotions, than in any other engagements; because they are irritated by restraint.

Let us bring home this matter to ourselves. We attend, and perhaps have long attended the services of the sanctuary. But let us ask, from what principle or motive? Is it to obey God? Is it to seek his face? Is it to obtain the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ? A Christian can say, "It is good for me to draw near to God." "I have loved the habitation of thy house." "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." We have no piety unless we regard religious duties as religious privileges: and are able to say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."

We are too prone to err in judging of persons by their presence in our holy assemblies. It is a positive proof against a man if he neglects them: but his attendance is not a decisive evidence in his favour. Solomon saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy. And many a one, unless deprived of reason and reflection, will, at a dying hour, exclaim, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." Thus Doeg, while remaining demurely in the divine presence, instead of minding his devotion, was observing the intercourse between David and Ahimelech, doing mischief, and determining by lies to achieve murder! Lord, what is man!

FEBRUARY 26.

"*Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*"—Psalm lxiii. 7.

Man is called a rational creature; but he deserves the character for the possession of reason, rather than the exercise of it. He has powers; but his depravity leads to the neglect or perversion of them. Thus he is able to reflect, and to anticipate; but governed by things only present to his senses, he never regards the past and the future, unless in connexion with the body and the life that now is. *There* indeed he often displays a prudence that forms a lamentable contrast with his indifference and inattention in the concerns of the soul and eternity. *There* he rises early, sits up late, compasses sea and land, and recalls all his former miscarriages or successes for his after use and improvement. But how foolish is he, and ignorant, and like a beast before God, in things that accompany salvation! It is otherwise with the follower of Jesus. He is renewed in the spirit of his mind. He regards religion as the one thing needful, and never imagines himself prospering unless his soul prospers. His reason is enlarged and directed by faith. He thinks for moral and spiritual purposes of the past and the future—he looks backward with humiliation and gratitude, and forward with prayer and hope. Therefore David said, "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Let us make his words our own.

Let us make his acknowledgment our own. —"Thou hast been my help." In what have we not required his succour, and in what have we not experienced it? Has he not helped us in our temporal exigencies, and yet more in our spiritual concerns? Has he not seasonably and constantly helped us in our *duties?* We have had much to do; our work has been the most serious, important, and difficult; and we have had no sufficiency of ourselves. But the Lord we serve is not an Egyptian task-master, enjoining us to make brick without straw. His grace has been sufficient for us. His Spirit has helped our infirmities; and he has worked in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. Has he not helped us in our *sufferings?* We have not

only had much to do, but also to bear. Our personal and relative trials have been many and various; and the bitterness of some of them, the heart only has known. But how true are the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel!

"Our sorrows and our griefs we pour
Into the bosom of our God:
He hears us in the mournful hour,
And helps us bear the heavy load."

We have found him a very present help in trouble. He has afforded us support, so that we have not sunk in the day of adversity, and been swallowed up of over-much sorrow. He has commanded for us deliverances, and sometimes in cases in which we were troubled on every side, and could see no way of escape. He has also saved us from the sins of the condition; enabled us to glorify the Lord in the fires; taught us to learn obedience by the things we suffer, and to gather from our chastenings the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Let us make his resolution our own—"Under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." God has no wings: but he has perfections. He has wisdom, power, goodness, and truth. He has made with us an everlasting covenant. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises. His providence performeth all things for us. The allusion is to a bird. The hen has wings, and gathers her chickens under them from harm when the hawk hovers near, and the storm approaches, and the night comes on. The image seems low when applied to God; for every figure falls infinitely short of his glory. Yet they have their use, and aid the understanding, the impression, and remembrance of divine truth. And the wings afford not only concealment and defence, but a warm, soft, pleasing, and delightful retreat; and the feathered mother loves to cover her infant brood, and feel them at her side. So God saves his people, and rejoices over them with joy, and rests in his love: so they rejoice under the shadow of his wings. A situation is nothing unless we make use of it. The security results from our application of the advantage; and David was aware of this, and therefore cries, "I flee unto thee to hide me." Hence says Solomon, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." And by rejoicing under the shadow of God's wings, he can intend nothing less than his having recourse to it; but he includes much more—That he would repair to it from choice, and realize it with thankfulness, and enjoy it with complacency and exultation. It is what he enjoins upon others when he says, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." It is what the Church resolves to do when she exclaims, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

Let us make his reasoning our own; and derive, as he did, confidence from experience—"*Because* thou *hast* been my help, *therefore* under the shadow of thy wings *will* I rejoice." It is needless to observe how frequently this mode of arguing and acting is exemplified in the Scriptures. And what can more naturally tend to encourage us in the Lord our God than the proofs we have had of his power, faithfulness, mercy, and grace? The fisherman is the more inclined to repair to the place where he has been successful. The beggar feels no excitement to revisit the door where he was insulted or repulsed; but he hastens to the house where he has always met with kindness and relief. He may indeed feel some hesitation arising from the thought that he has frequently been there before. But the oftener we come, the more welcome we are. The beggar too, when after an absence he applies again, may find a change in the benefactor as to his disposition, or even his ability. But the Lord changeth not. What he has been, he is, and will be for ever. His hand is not shortened that he cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear. And one of the designs of God in his kindness towards us is, not only by his benefits to relieve our present wants, but to excite our future applications and embolden our future hope.

If we have *never* addressed God, we are authorized to do it; but our encouragement in our first approach must be derived only from faith. But some have believed, and have now the witness in themselves. They have made the trial. They go to a known God—And they that know his Name will put their trust in him. Nothing is more becoming a Christian than a lively cheerful confidence. And in order to maintain and increase it, we shall do well to consider not only God's word, but his works; and to remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. "For thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

FEBRUARY 27.

"*Behold, we count them happy which endure.*"
James v. 11.

This seems a strange judgment; and we may ask, Who are they that draw such a conclusion?

There is a sense in which men in general make this estimate. They commonly admire those that suffer well; and are struck with instances of prudence in difficulties, and magnanimity in dangers; calmness in a storm,

and firmness under an operation. There is a tameness in the character of one who has always sat in the lap of ease and indulgence. The most striking and interesting materials for biography are derived from those sudden changes and painful occurrences which tried, discovered, and improved the sufferers who had to encounter them.

Yea, men, even natural men, have often admired those who have endured for the sake of religion. For it has been the strange lot of many of God's people to be hated and persecuted while living, and to be praised and extolled when dead. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees painted and garnished the tombs of the prophets their forefathers had slain, at the very time they wished to crucify the only begotten Son of God. And thus many now talk highly of the noble army of martyrs, who revile some of their fellow-creatures for displaying a little of the same spirit by which they were actuated. Deceased saints are beyond our envy. They are no longer seen or heard. They no longer reproach us by their conversation and temper; no longer incommode us by disturbing us when we wish to sleep, or by flashing upon us truths of which we are willingly ignorant.

We should therefore inquire, not what we think of dead saints, but how we feel towards living ones. These are scoffed at by many: are they with us more excellent than their neighbours? Is all our delight in them? Are they our brethren and companions? "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him."

The Apostle however attests here, not the judgment of men, but of believers. These differ widely from each other in their sentiments with regard to a thousand subjects—especially misery and happiness. Men call the proud happy; but God resisteth the proud. Men bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. Men are afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; but God tells us a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. And faith confers not with flesh and blood: it does not estimate things by time, but eternity; it does not view them through the reports of sense, but through the decisions of unerring wisdom; and echoes back the testimony of God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit—Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness—Blessed are they that mourn—If ye suffer for the sake of Christ, happy are ye."

When we believe the principle from which their afflictions are sent; the designs they are to accomplish; the evils they prevent; the peaceable fruits of righteousness they yield; the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory they work out; and even the supports and consolations enjoyed under them: we shall feel little difficulty in the decision—"Happy is the man,' not who escapes the rod, but "whom the Lord correcteth." Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Lord. Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

FEBRUARY 28.

"*Ye have heard of the patience of Job.*"—James v. 11.

There was therefore really such a man to be heard of; and the book that bears his name is therefore not a parabolic representation, but a true history. Ezekiel mentions him more than once, with Noah and Daniel. *They* were real characters; and would Job have been specified with them had he been a fictitious one? Noah and Daniel, and a metaphor! James also associates him as an example with the prophets, who were not imaginary, but real beings.

But how came we to hear of this man at all, seeing he lived more than two thousand miles off, and more than four thousand years ago? "He was the greatest man in the east." But his estate would never have been noticed, had he possessed nothing else: a man is nothing the more to God for the number of his sheep, oxen, and asses. "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." But he was as good as he was great; and his accuser was told that he was "a perfect and an upright man." Yet we should have known nothing of his moral and spiritual worth but for his afflictions. His calamities were his trial, and his triumph: these have filled the earth with his renown. Many names in the book of martyrs would have perished in oblivion but for the sufferings that raised and immortalized them. The servants of God are never so remarked, so impressive, so useful, as when they are called forth by trouble to be his witnesses, and to glorify him in the fires: and little do they frequently imagine what personal and relative, what public and remote consequences may result from their enduring. What would Joseph have been, what would he have done, but for the persecutions and hardships through which he arose to eminence, influence, and fame? And thus you have heard of the patience of Job—

—Not his *insensibility*. Patience is not stoicism. There is no patience in a stone: there is no virtue in bearing what we do not feel. Job is never senseless under his woes. When he said, "My friends scorn me," he adds, "but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." With what earnestness does he call for commiseration! "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." And when he heard of all the evil that had come upon him, "he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground,

and worshipped." You have heard of the patience of Job—

—Not his *impatience*. And yet he cursed the day of his birth, and prayed for death, and said, I loathe it, I would not live always. O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave! There the wicked cease from troubling: and there the weary are at rest. But not a word of this is here mentioned. No. He had repented of it, and it had been forgiven him: and the sins and iniquities of his people God remembers no more. No. It was not the display of his habitual disposition; but a partial and temporary emotion, issuing not from his principles, but against them. And does not this omission of his fault by an Apostle teach us—That a man is to be judged of by his general character and conduct?—That we should be peculiarly lenient towards a person in great sufferings; when by the violence of the storm, reason and religion for a moment may be upset; and in the anarchy, nature involuntarily utters things which grace will afterwards be sure to condemn?—Yea, that we should *always* speak of our brethren with candor and kindness. The wicked watch only for their halting; they would make them offenders for a word; they overlook a thousand good things, and greedily seize upon a single failing, and magnify this into a crime—But charity covereth a multitude of sins. It will allow and require us indeed to be severe towards ourselves; but it will induce us to make the best of things in others, not only because from our infirmities we may need the same tenderness, but that we may be followers of the God of all grace. Yes,

You *have* heard of his *patience;* and you have been accustomed from your infancy to consider him as the most patient of all men. And this is just, if his patience is to be estimated, as it ought to be, by his sufferings. Miseries of *every* kind fell upon him—and they fell upon *all* his comforts. They fell upon his estate—and deprived him of all his substance; upon his family—and his servants were slain; and all his children were crushed to death; and his wife urged him to curse God and die; and his friends mistook his case and reproached him with hypocrisy and wickedness; upon his body—and he had no ease from pain; was covered with sore boils from head to foot, so that he said, "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and, become loathsome." All this came upon him at once—and it was all enhanced by his previous condition: for he had seen better days: he had been indulged by every kind and degree of prosperity; and he presumed he should "die in his nest"—vain hope! How well could he say, "My complaint is bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning." "I was not in safety—neither had I rest—neither was I quiet—yet trouble came." And

Yet "in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Yet he said, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Yet he said, "what! shall we receive good at the Lord's hand, and shall we not receive evil?" Yet he said, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

But by nature he could not have thus endured. And we here see what the grace of God can effect. Let us remember that he is called "the God of patience"—and not only because he requires it—but because he produces it, sustains it, perfects it. With him is the residue of the Spirit. Look to him; repair to him, ye sufferers. Honour him not only by your application, but by your confidence. Despair! YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

MARCH 1.

"*Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found.*"—Hosea xiv. 8.

THE announcement represents Ephraim in his return to God: and God in his reception of Ephraim.

In his return to God, Ephraim should say, "What have I any more to do with idols?" The language owns his former attachment, while it expresses his present aversion and rejection—"I have had too much to do with them. O how degrading and painful to look back on years of folly and of guilt! Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over me; henceforth by thee only will I make mention of thy name."

This was very proper for *him;* but what is this to *us?* Are persons *here* chargeable with idolatry even before conversion! Not indeed as to the grossness of the offence. When we consider idolatry literally, it would seem impossible that a rational being should bow down, not only to the sun, moon, and stars, but to his fellow-creatures, to animals, to reptiles, to wood and stone, to the work of his own hands. Yet what says all history?—And not only were the heathens thus besotted, but the Jews also. Ephraim worshipped the calves. And if we advert to the refinement of these abominations, and pass from literal to spiritual idolatry, every man by nature is an idolater. What was the Fall, but a defection from God! What is sin, but the transfer to the creature of the regard due to the Creator? And it matters not whether the rival and engrosser be a worm, or an angel. Whatever

we fear or value more than God, is to us an idol. Thus we read of "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" and of some "who make gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence;" and of others "who make flesh their arm." God alone can heal us; and yet we seek to the physician, and not to God. His blessing alone maketh rich; and yet we form our plans without him, and ascribe our successes to our own skill and care. He is the God of our salvation; and yet we depend on our own worthiness and strength, instead of saying, In the Lord I have righteousness and strength. "Little children," says John, "keep yourselves from idols." We may make idols of our relations, idols of our opinions, idols of our religious parties, idols of our ministers, idols of the means of grace—What is heaven? A state in which God is all in all. What is the effect of growing sanctification? Our waiting on God all the day. What is conversion? A turning away from the world to God, saying, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee."—"It is good for me to draw near to God"—"What have I any more to do with idols?"

And observe the disposition of God towards the repenting Ephraim.

He observes the *workings of his heart*—"I have heard and observed him." This is to be restrained to the nature of the case. It is an awful reflection, that God is in every place: he hears and observes all his creatures. But much more is here intended than mere observation: it is observation accompanied with approbation and delight. Such a penitent is either disregarded or despised by the world. At best he is considered as the subject of a weak mind or a disordered imagination. But truth assures us that he is now coming to himself; that the angels rejoice over him; while God himself says, "to that man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

He *presents himself as his shelter and refreshment*—"I am like a green fir-tree." Is not this image below God? So is every comparison. Figures taken from the sublimest objects in nature come infinitely short of his glory. Yet such allusions are useful and necessary. In the east too, a fir-tree is far more than we see it here; beautiful in its appearance, growing to a great height, yielding a fragrant scent, spreading very widely, and affording a desirable retreat to the traveller. But a metaphor must not be pressed. The import of it is often purely relative to some one thing rendered valuable by the present circumstances of the individual. Such is cold water to a thirsty soul. Such is a cloud in harvest. The simple idea here is shade and perpetual verdure: the fir-tree being an evergreen, the same in summer and winter—Thus God is the same to the soul that trusts in him at all times and in all conditions: and if we would be raised above the influence of fear and trouble, we must sit beneath the shadow of the Almighty, and realize his perfections, presence, promises, and providence as unchangeably concerned for our welfare. Creatures may all fail us; but He is the same. "My salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

He engages to furnish *fertility*—"From me is thy fruit found." This supplies a deficiency in the former image. A fir-tree, though always green and affording shade, yet yields no fruit: but the Lord affords repast as well as repose. These are united in the acknowledgment of the Church: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." This fruit is to be taken two ways. First, for the fruit they enjoy. What is this but all spiritual blessings, pardon, peace, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the foretastes of Heaven? This is the believer's fruit, because he is the possessor of it: but in me, says the Lord, it is found as the source and giver. Let us seek it alone in him. Paradise had nothing like it. Secondly, for the fruit they bear. This includes their graces, duties, and good works. To these our Saviour refers when he says, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." This is ours because we are the subjects of it; but he is the author. We receive the influences, but he imparts them. We exercise the principles, but he produces them. We render the obedience, but he inclines and enables us. We repent and believe, but the repentance and the faith are his gifts. We work out our salvation, but he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. They are therefore called "the fruit of the Spirit:" and "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the *glory and praise of God*"—"FROM ME IS THY FRUIT FOUND."

MARCH 2.

"*All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us.*"—2 Cor. i. 20.

THERE is some difference between God's purposes and promises. Both of them so to speak are gold: but the one, gold in the mint: the other, gold in the mint impressed and prepared for currency and use. God could have

blessed his people without previously announcing it, and bringing himself under an engagement; but in this case his design could not have been known, believed, expected, pleaded. But the promises give rise to a life of faith, and hope, and patience, and prayer.

Let me contemplate these promises in their relation to *Christ*—They "are *in* him." All their contents are found in him: indeed he himself is the substance of the whole. In the Covenant of Grace he is the Covenantee; and the promises of it are made, not immediately with us but with him, as our head representative and surety. He performed the awful condition on which they were all founded; and has ratified them by his own blood. He is also the pledge of their existence and accomplishment. They might seem too great to be believed were it not for *himself*, who is greater than any thing God has promised. But he *has* been given; and "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!" If the promises are in him, the way to possess and enjoy them all is to receive him—"He that hath the Son hath life."

Let me also view them in their *certainty*—"All the promises of God in him are *yea*, and in him *amen*." All the promises of Satan are falsehood. Human promises are not always truth. David indeed erred when he said in his haste—all men are liars; yet too commonly "men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie." But even Balaam could say, "The Lord is not a man that *he* should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath *he* said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Men fail in their promises through forgetfulness, or changeableness of mind, or inability of performance. But can *he* forget, whose understanding is infinite? Can *he* change his purpose who is in one mind, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Can any thing be too hard for the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Let us therefore honour God by our confidence. If we have a word from him, let it satisfy us whatever difficulties oppose the accomplishment—these are for *him* to consider who has promised. Abraham, therefore, having received the divine assurance, though there were improbabilities, and even natural impossibilities in the way, "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Hence

Let me observe them in their *design*—"To *the glory of God*." God is glorified in them as they are all yea and amen: for nothing can be more honourable to God than the impossibility of impeaching his veracity. He is therefore called "the faithful God." "His faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds;" and far beyond them—his "faithfulness is established in the very heavens;" and the fame of it there draws forth the acclamation, "Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!" But his wisdom and power also are glorified in the time and manner of their accomplishment. Above all, how does not only the fulfilment but the donation of these promises display the exceeding riches of his grace! For what but the most undeserved favour and boundless mercy could have led him to remember us in our low estate, and instead of threatening us with destruction, promise us eternal life and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ!

Finally, let me remark the *instrumentality* of this design—"To the glory of God *by us*." By us as *ministers*—publishing, explaining, applying them. A promise is often like a box of ointment very precious; but the fragrance does not fill the room till the preacher breaks it. Or it is like the water that was near Hagar which she saw not, till the angel of the Lord opens our eyes and shows us the well. By us *believers*—realizing the excellency and efficacy of them in our character and conduct. It is when these promises are reduced to experience; when they are seen cleansing us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, making us partakers of the divine nature, leading us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, filling us with kindness and benevolence, supporting us cheerfully under all our trials; it is then they glorify God *by us*.

How responsibly should they feel, and how carefully should they walk, who are intrusted with the honour of God in his word—which he magnifies above all his Name!

MARCH 3.

"*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"
Acts xvi. 30.

We may imagine the manner in which the jailer had addressed Paul and Silas before, from the manner in which he treated them; for having received them in charge, he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks, while their backs were bruised and bleeding from the scourge; for their wounds were not dressed till some hours after. Doubtless bad words and reproachful names were added to the cruelty. But however he had insulted them before, he now reveres them more than kings; and calling for a light, he springs in, and comes trembling, and falls down before them in the inner prison, and brings them out, and cries, "What must I do to be saved?"

This was obviously the language of apprehension. He saw he was in danger of being lost. But how lost? Some have supposed that he refers to his temporal danger. The Roman jailer was made answerable for his prisoner; and if the prisoner escaped, the jailer bore the punishment the prisoner was

doomed to endure. At first therefore the keeper *was* thus alarmed; for upon the earthquake, which shook the foundations of the prison, so that the doors were opened, and every man's bands were loosed, he awaked out of his sleep, and drew his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled. But his alarm on *this* account must have been removed, as soon as ever Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." And the answer given to his inquiry, shows that he did not refer to temporal death; for though faith in Christ saved him from hell, it would not have saved him from the penalty of the Roman law had he incurred it.

His anxiety, therefore, regards his spiritual and eternal state. It is in vain to argue against this, and say, how could this be, as it supposes a knowledge which this Pagan could not possess? For the heathen generally had some sense of a future state; and were all their life-time subject to bondage through fear of death. Often their uneasinesses were such, that to obtain something like peace of mind, they would endure the greatest privations and self-inflicted tortures, and give the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. God indeed has a witness in every bosom. Every man is a sinner; his conscience condemns him; he feels his need of pardon. Were he guiltless, he would be fearless. The innocent do not tremble when they hear the trumpet announcing the entrance of the Judge; but only those who are to be tried. The earthquake had roused the jailer's dread of the power and anger of God. Perhaps he had heard Paul and Silas singing in the stocks. Perhaps they had dropped something while he was misusing them that had impressed his mind. Perhaps he had been informed of their preaching; and doubtless he had been told of the language of the Pythoness, who for many days had cried, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto men the way of salvation." To which we may well add, how soon the Spirit of God can reach the heart, and enter the conscience like a conqueror at the head of an army. No wonder his apprehension made him cry, "What must I do to be saved?" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. If a man were any way exposed to it, we should think it impossible that he could enjoy a moment's ease; or be capable of feeling a lighter sorrow, in hazard of such a tremendous doom. When I was awakened, says Bunyan, nothing so astonished me as to see how my fellow-creatures were affected with their outward troubles—I had many of these; but I could only cry, How shall I escape the damnation of hell!

His language contains a desire of information. In such a state as this, ignorance is dreadful, and perplexity intolerable. And in vain you address the man concerning any other subject. Tell me, says he, how I can flee from the wrath to come? How I can obtain acceptance with God? How I can be renewed in the spirit of my mind? Is there balm in Gilead, and a physician there? And *what* is the balm? *Who* is that physician? He also dreads imposition. Tell me the true state of my soul. If there be hope, announce it; but do not flatter me. Nothing will now satisfy the mind but certainty. And the man has it not in his power to be his own instructor or comforter. He distrusts himself, and suspects every thing like comfort that comes from his own heart which has so often deceived him. Now therefore he prizes the means and the source of information. He reads the Scripture—and for the purpose for which it was written. He hears the word—and for the purpose for which it is preached. How beautiful now are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings! How endeared the throne of grace where the prayer is heard, "Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."

Here was also a readiness to submit to the method prescribed for his deliverance. Some, when they are alarmed, think of building a shelter rather than of fleeing for refuge. They indulge in a legal bias, and human reasonings; and going about to establish their own righteousness, do not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. The simplicity of the scheme of gospel grace, pays no homage to the idol self; and the spiritual Naaman is ready to turn away in a rage, because the mode of relief is not such as he "thought." The scheme is additionally offensive, because it demands the destruction also of every sin; and men love independence, and to walk according to the way of their own hearts. But bring a man into the state of the jailer, and he will be willing to yield—willing to be led. Tell him the way, and he will walk in it. Tell him the remedy, and he will submit to it, however it may require him to stoop, or whatever it may require him to sacrifice. Dr. Chyne was an eminent as well as a pious physician. But he was supposed to be severe in his regimen. When he had prescribed, and the patient began to object to the treatment, he would say, "I see you are not bad enough for me yet." Some are not bad enough for Christ yet—we mean in their own apprehension. But when they find and feel that they are entirely lost, and have no other help or hope, they will cordially acquiesce in his recommendation, however mysterious, however humbling, however trying. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the death."

Let me not think this inquiry was proper for the jailer only. All have sinned. And

he soul that sinneth it shall die. It should herefore be the inquiry of every man. O my soul, let it be thine!

What is the answer?——

MARCH 4.

'*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*"—Acts xvi. 31.

They overlook his injurious treatment of hem. They do not take advantage of his present distress to insult him, as the council did Judas, who when he cast down the pieces of silver, confessing he had sinned and betrayed innocent blood, said, "What is that to us? See thou to that." Yea, they hear with delight his exclamation, "What must I do to be saved?" Such cries as this are music in the ears of those who long to save souls from death—"Your case is bad, but it is not hopeless. You are guilty and condemned, and there is only one way of deliverance—But there *is* one. We have tried it ourselves, and have found it effectual, and recommend it to you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Here is the advantage of knowledge and of experience in those who have to deal with souls in spiritual distress. They can speak readily and clearly; and with confidence and earnestness—"Lo this, we have searched it; so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." What could the heathen philosophers have done with this question? Or what the Scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' chair? What would a modern infidel make of it? How many called divines, would answer: "Be not too much distressed. You are not worse than others. All are frail. God knows our frame. He will not be severe to mark what we do amiss. Guard against these gloomy notions which drive people to distraction or despondency. Take exercise. Go into company. Moderately indulge in the amusements of life." Or if any thing more religious be said, it would be, "Reform whatever may have been vicious: and in proper time prepare yourself for a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper." How different was the language of Paul and Silas! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

This teaches us that awakened souls are to be led immediately to Christ. There are some who are slow to bring forward the glad tidings of salvation, fearing that such persons are not yet distressed and humbled enough. But it is obvious that a long process to prepare for an application to the Lord Jesus was not deemed necessary by the Apostles. They presented him at once: through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified. He did the same himself: "Come unto me"—'Look unto me." No other recommendation can be available. Every other direction will turn the sinner aside from safety and relief. All the peace obtained by any other means is only a temporary delusion. "Why should I wait? I want a mediator between me and God, but I do not want a mediator between me and Christ. I *must* come to him as I am. And I *may* come—'all the fitness he requireth is to feel my need of him.'"

The answer shows that there is salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that he came into the world to save sinners; and that he is now exalted at God's own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour. With him is plenteous redemption; free deliverance from the guilt, the pollution, and the consequences of sin; and for ever—

The way to realize this is believing. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." Unless we begin here, we commence at the wrong end. Good works do not produce faith, but faith produces good works. If we see a fellow-creature wrecked and ready to sink, the first thing is to get out the life-boat. It would be absurd to go to the dying bed of a man, and begin to admonish him how he ought to walk and to work—The man is dying. Send for the physician—Bring a remedy. When recovered, admonition will be reasonable and needful. God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish: and however salvation is represented in the Scripture, we see faith is essential to it. Whatever Christ may be in himself, he can be nothing to us without it. He is indeed the refuge, but a refuge cannot secure us unless it be entered; and it can only be entered by faith. He is indeed the bread of life, but food cannot nourish us unless it be eaten; and it can only be eaten by faith. The grand thing therefore is to believe the record concerning him; and to trust in his name; to rely upon his grace; to apply to him for all the purposes he is revealed to accomplish; and to receive him as he is held forth to us in the gospel.

This course will not fail. Salvation is insured to believing. As without faith we cannot be saved, so with it we cannot perish. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

If therefore you feel your need of salvation, repair to him, and say, "Let this ruin be under thy hand." He is mighty to save. He is able to save to the uttermost. And while his power enables him to save, his goodness inclines him to save. His soul is the dwelling-place of pity. His heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love. And while his goodness inclines him to save, his promise

binds him to save—He cannot deny himself. He has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

"My soul obeys the Almighty call,
And runs to this relief;
I would believe thy promise, Lord;
O help mine unbelief."

MARCH 5.

"*And Ekron as a Jebusite.*"—Zech. ix. 7.

The prophecy in which these words are found shows, that God in judgment remembers mercy; and can punish her enemies without injuring the Church; and can even increase her welfare by means of it. Desolations were coming upon the Syrians, and Tyrians, and Philistines; but a remnant should be saved and *converted*, so as to become the worshippers and people of the God of Israel! This is exemplified in the latter of these powers: "I will cut off the pride of the Philistines: and I will take away the blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite." The Philistines were the most constant and implacable of all the adversaries of the Jews. Ekron was one of their greatest capitals. It was the residence of Beelzebub the chief of the devils; and is put by the poets for hell itself. Jebus is the old name for Jerusalem. Hence we read that "David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land." The meaning of the words therefore is, that the inhabitants of Ekron should become as the denizen of Jerusalem; no longer an enemy, or a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. Two remarks arise from this promise.

First,—It is a great thing to be a Jebusite. The Apostle speaks of it as the highest of all privileges, that we "are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and to the heavenly Jerusalem;" and that "Jerusalem, which is above, and which is free, is the mother of us all." Of this city of our God, glorious things are spoken, and they are not vain words. What a governor have these citizens! He is fairer than the children of men; he is the king of glory. What a charter have they! What can equal their defence and safety? What can equal their liberty? What their commerce and wealth? What their happiness! Their peace passeth all understanding—Their joy is unspeakable and full of glory—"as well the singers, as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee."

Secondly,—Jebusites may be derived from Ekronites. Here we have the evidence of fact. The thing has been done; and the most unlikely characters have furnished pious converts. We can make an appeal to Manasseh, who had sinned away all the effects of a godly education, and had become the most daring idolater; and such a murderer, that he made the streets of Jerusalem to run down with innocent blood—yet he, even he, sought and found the Lord God of his fathers. We could appeal to the dying thief, blaspheming with his companion one moment, and praying the next, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." We could appeal to the murderers of Jesus, so soon washed in the blood which they themselves had shed. What could surpass the guilt and depravity of the Corinthians? Yet they were washed, they were justified, they were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And what says Paul of himself? "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy"—and "for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ should show forth all long-suffering, as a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him, to life everlasting."

Here, from what he has done, we see what he *can* do. We see also what he *must* do; for he has bound himself by his word. And who are the heirs of promise? From whence are they to be brought; and from what materials are the subjects of his grace to be formed? "Princes shall come out of Egypt." "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." "The beasts of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls."

Much of these announcements is indeed highly figurative, but the meaning cannot be mistaken, and the truth of it is perpetually accomplishing. For, blessed be God, these changes are not imaginary representations. The pictures are from real life; and the originals are to be found. We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. We have seen the profligate becoming not only moral but holy—the proud clothed with humility—the niggard and the churl learning to be bountiful and kind—the earthly-minded seeking the things that are above—the curses of the neighbourhood going about doing good. Well may the Author of all good say, "This people have *I* formed for myself; they shall show forth my *praise*"—What displays, what triumphs are they of the freeness, the riches, and the power of his grace!

Let none despair. However desperate their case is with regard to their own resources, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Neither let us despond with regard to any

of our fellow-creatures. We may be tempted to think some of them beyond the possibility of reclaim. But God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Let us not abandon them, but persevere in the use of means—animated by prayer—and strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

MARCH 6.

"*Do not all go to one place?*"—Eccles. vi. 6.

What place? There are four places; and a universality of passengers is approaching each of them. An absolute universality with regard to the two first; and a specific universality with regard to the two second.

There is *the grave*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes. "All go to one place—all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." No one denies this; and yet no one seems to believe it, at least with regard to himself! Who would suppose that thousands around us ever said, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." What a proof is this, that convictions however clear, and belief however firm, may be paralyzed and rendered uninfluential!

There is *the judgment-seat*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes: "We must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." The high will not be excused; the low will not be overlooked. "I saw the dead," says John, "small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened." And the Judge himself tells us, that "before him shall be gathered all nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left—and these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Now therefore a separation takes place, and what before applied to all with regard to *nature*, will now apply to all only with regard to *character*.

There is *hell*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes, all the wicked: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." Their sin is very diversified; and though all go astray like sheep, they turn every one to his own way. The covetous and the cruel, the hypocrite and the profligate, the scoffer and the formalist, the swearer and the slanderer, are all in various directions going the downward road, and will meet in the same place of torment. There is something inexpressibly dreadful in the thought of mixing with such society. And when we consider the number of the damned, their malignity, their mutual accusations, their hatred of each other, their freedom from all the restraints which check the bad and vile while here, their power to curse and tear each other, under the empire too of the devil and his angels—who would not cry, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men."

There is *heaven*. Do not all go to *this* place! Yes, all *the righteous*—all who are justified by faith, and renewed in the spirit of their mind. We need not ask where this place is; it is enough to know that Jesus has said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also." There, out of every period of time, and out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue, he will gather together in one, the children of God which were scattered abroad. Here they differed in their outward condition, in their religious opinions and usages, and in the degree of their grace; but they were all one *in* Christ Jesus, and now they are all one *with* him. Is this candour and comprehensiveness in heaven an excellency? Let us approach it as much as possible; and as we are all going to one place, let us not fall out by the way. Let us pray, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;" and let us show, by our freedom from bigotry, that our prayer is not hypocrisy or formality. Many a persecuting and many a censorious spirit has had liberality enough upon his oily lips, especially at public meetings, who has only scowled hate or dislike towards his differing brethren at all other times. But the Master says, "Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant."

MARCH 7.

"*Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.*"—Luke xxii. 28, 29.

The dying Patriarch said of Reuben, "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Stability is essential to excellency. Without it no reputation can be acquired, no confidence can be supported, no usefulness can be insured. Even obstinacy, which is ignorant resolution, is more allied to excellency than versatility. You may build upon a rock; but what can be done on shifting and sliding sand? If a man be one thing to-day and another to-morrow; if he yields to every fresh impression like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed; and is governed by circumstances instead of principles; he can never display *character*, for character is the effect and fame of habit.

Nothing recommends a man more than stedfastness in friendship, especially when the adherence has to struggle with difficulties. This is what our Lord here commends in his disciples—They had "continued with him in his temptations."

If the enemy ever left Christ, it was only for "a season;" he soon returned again to the assault; and urged him even to infidelity, presumption, suicide, and idolatry—How well is it said—

> "He knows what sore temptations mean,
> For he has felt the same."—

But our Lord does not here refer to *such* temptations, and especially those he endured in the *wilderness*. In these his disciples were not present—*he* was alone—of the people there was none with him. In the Scripture, temptations do not always, nor most commonly, signify enticements to sin; but any events that morally try us in the way of duty. In such trials his disciples continued with him: they found him poor and despised; bearing the contradiction of sinners against himself; slandered; menaced; and in danger of death. And they were willing to share in the same treatment. They denied themselves, and took up *their* cross and followed *him*. They deemed it enough for the servant to be as the master, and the disciple as his Lord.

There are trials now to which they who are with him are exposed. They are called, "the sufferings of Christ;" "his reproach;" and here *his* "temptations;" as they accompany his cause, and are endured for his sake. They are not all of a painful nature, or consisting in various degrees of persecution. His followers are often tried in other ways. There are the dangers of prosperity as well as of adversity. The world has its allurements as well as frowns, and is more perilous in its friendship than its enmity. There must be heresies, that they who are of a contrary part may be made manifest. There will always be many who will turn again to folly from the holy commandment delivered them, and will endeavour to draw away others. Happy they, who while the Saviour says, "Will ye also go away?" can answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." For, "blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

Observe, O my soul, how he insures and amplifies the privilege: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." The grant is not an estate, a province, a principality, but a kingdom! And observe two things with regard to it. First. See the Saviour's authority and dominion: "*I* appoint unto you a kingdom." The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: and he has given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. The fullness from which he should dispense to the myriads of the saved all the blessings of grace and glory, was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross. It is the fruit of the travail of his soul, and it satisfies him; it yields infinite delight to his benevolent heart. And how must the gift be endeared to the receiver when it is conferred by his own dear hand—

> "The righteous Judge at that great day
> Shall place it on my head."

Secondly—he is not only the appointer, but the model of the appointment—"as my Father hath appointed me." The *ground* of the Father's appointment of *him* was indeed peculiar—*He* deserved it and could claim it. He fulfilled the high and awful condition on which it was suspended, his suffering and death. The cause of the Saviour's appointment of *us* is nothing meritorious; it is mercy and grace, though founded in his own claims. But the one is as real as the other; and as certain in the accomplishment; and terminates in the same state; and as far as our nature will allow, we shall partake of the same blessedness and honour with himself, though conscious that we have not reached the elevation in the same way. The Scripture cannot be more decisive than it is—"we are quickened together with Christ, raised up and made to sit with him in the heavenly places." "When he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne." And herein again we rejoice—as all our happiness and dignity will be received *from* him, so it will be enjoyed *with* him—"*Where* I am there shall also my servants be"—"We shall live together with him."

MARCH 8.

"*And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.*"—Gen. xxx. 1.

HERE we see a little of the evils of polygamy. How hard is it to maintain an equality of satisfaction where there are different claimants feeling alike in their pretensions! Yet if there be a partiality of regard, either real or supposed, what can be expected but discord and wretchedness? How much more agreeably did Isaac and Rebecca live together, according to God's original appointment, than poor Jacob with his two wives! What could ever justify a practice at war with morality and the happiness of domestic life, the fountain-head of society?

Observe Rachel's ill-humour. Bodily charms with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit would be irresistible; but a pretty face and a gentle temper are seldom found together. Rachel was beautiful; but because she bore Jacob no children, like her sister, "she envied her." There is nothing against which we should more guard ourselves than

envy. It is a quality the most unlovely and diabolical. Envy is grief, not at another's woe but another's welfare. It is the rottenness of the bones; it is the bane of self-enjoyment; it is quarrelling with God for making another to differ from us. It is awful to think how naturally prone we are to this vice—"The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy."

See her intemperate desire. "And she said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die." There was no harm in the wish for offspring. They are the natural privilege of marriage. And many have supposed that the Jewish wives wished so much to be mothers, as the promise of God entailed the richest blessings on the posterity of Abraham, and because from his seed according to the flesh, the desire of all nations was to descend. This probably had some influence; but the principal thing was the respect attached to fruitfulness. In a more refined and improved state of society, intellectual and moral qualities are sufficient to obtain distinction; but in the earlier and ruder ages, outward and corporeal attributes are chiefly regarded. In *their* modes of living, too, children were an advantage and a defence. Hence the language of Scripture: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Hence the conception after barrenness in the cases of Sarah and Manoah's wife, and Hannah and Elizabeth, drew forth such joy and praise—But what could be so censurable as the inordinate language of Rachel—"If my wish be not gratified, I shall offer violence to my life, or fret myself into the grave. In some way or other it will prove my death."

But ah! what ignorance of the future, and of her real welfare does she here betray! "Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" How little was Lot aware of the fearful consequences arising from the indulgence of his wish in the choice of the vale of Sodom, well-watered, and looking like the garden of the Lord! The Jews obtained quails in answer to their pettish request; but he gave them their heart's desire, and sent leanness into their souls: while the flesh was between their teeth, the wrath of God came upon them, and they died of their intemperance. They would have a king; and he showed his resentment not in denying but gratifying them. "He gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath." So here; Rachel says, "Give me children or else I die"—and she died not in the failure of her desire, but in the accomplishment of it, falling a victim to her second pregnancy: "And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; for thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day." And among other things engraven upon it is this —Let your desires be under the government of reason and religion—Extort nothing from God. As to spiritual blessings indeed we cannot be too importunate; but with regard to temporal we cannot be too resigned. We are allowed to ask for any comfort pertaining to this life, but we must ask submissively and conditionally. We must implore it only if it be good for us; and we must leave the determination of this to him that knoweth all things. This too is the surest way to succeed. God sees that while we are in a high fever of desire he cannot safely indulge us; but he is never unwilling to gratify us when he can do it without injury—For he "hath pleasure in the prosperity of his people."

MARCH 9.

"*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"—Rev. xxi. 4.

Unless we knew something of the world of glory, we could not desire it or prepare for it. Yet what we know is comparatively little: and it is rather negative than positive. In our present state, our liveliest feeling of good is the absence of evil; and of pleasure is the cessation of pain. And therefore, conformably to an experience well understood by every child of Adam, the happiness of heaven is held forth to our hopes as an exemption from every kind and degree of sorrow—and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Tears and sorrows do not always go together. Some people have a plenitude of tears, whose emotions are by no means deep and durable. Others can seldom weep; yet they feel, and feel the more, because their grief wants utterance. Persons in great anguish are commonly beyond weeping. This is seen in criminals preceding their execution.

When it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," it is taken for granted, that the eyes of his people are no strangers to them now. Grace does not exclude the sensibilities of our nature, but increases as well as refines them. We read of "them that mourn in Zion." And it is said, "they shall

come with weeping." Religion costs a Christian a thousand tears in addition to those which he inherits as a man—for "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards."

Of the tears they so frequently shed, we may remark, in particular, five sources. Those which arise from secular afflictions—such as difficulties, perplexities, and failures in business; and changes, reductions, and privations in outward circumstances. Those which arise from social trials—whether sympathy in sorrow, defections in friendship, or bereavements. Those which arise from bodily pains, indispositions, and decays. Those which flow from moral imperfections, and which are the most distressing to a pious mind. And those which spring from the sins of others; for rivers of tears run down their eyes, because men keep not God's law.

But of whatever kind their tears may be, the promise insures the removal of them. The removal has three characters. It is divine—"*God* shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." He alone can do it. But he is all-sufficient, and the God of all comfort. Even here, "when he giveth quietness, then who can make trouble?" It is *complete*—"God shall wipe away *all* tears from their eyes"—Who can tell what will be the last drop of the briny flood. But it *will* be shed. And there shall be *no* more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

It is *future*—"God *shall* wipe away all tears from their eyes." He wipes away many even now: but the days of their mourning are not yet ended. Whatever be their indulgences, earth will always be distinguished from heaven. They are now in the warfare; the triumph is to come. This is their seed-time, and they sow in tears; but they shall reap in joy.

Let us learn our obligation to the Redeemer of sinners. Our tears would never have been wiped away, but a miserable life would have been followed by a more miserable eternity, had not he interposed on our behalf, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; *therefore* are they before the Throne—"

Christians! in the multitude of your thoughts within you, let this comfort delight your souls. Life is the date of *all* your griefs. If the one be short, the other cannot be long. Not a single tear beyond the grave! Bear up faith, hope, and patience a little longer, and the "eye shall see evil no more."

What folly and madness to resign this prospect, and when the blessedness is within our reach to sacrifice it for a thing of naught! Yet are *we* in the number of those whose tears will be thus wiped away? It is certain that many are not heirs of this promise; and therefore whatever be their present distresses, they only feel the beginning of sorrows. Poor as their pleasures now are, they are the best—they are *all* the happiness—they will know. And the vanity and vexation of spirit here will issue in outer darkness hereafter, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth—

> "But as yet there is a hope,
> You may his mercy know;
> Though his arm be lifted up,
> He still forbears the blow"—

MARCH 10.

"*When the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate: and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it.*"—Ezekiel xlvi. 9.

To preserve the remembrance of his mighty works; to attach the people to the true religion by the frequent use of public and instructive services and ceremonies; to allow them seasons of rest and pleasure; to promote their acquaintance with their brethren; and to prefigure good things to come under the dispensation of the Gospel; God appointed various "solemn feasts" among the Jews. There were more especially three; the feast of the Passover or of unleavened bread, the feast of Pentecost or of weeks, and the feast of Tabernacles. Each of these was annual, and all the males were required to attend upon them in Jerusalem, where alone they could be celebrated.

In doing this, they "came before the Lord." For his dwelling-place was in Zion. There he sat between the cherubim, and communed with the worshippers from off the mercy-seat. Of his presence there, he gave not only real but miraculous proof, in the cloud of glory, and in the answers from the holy oracle. Though his manifestations are less sensible, he is as truly present in the Christian as in the Jewish sanctuary. It is insured by his promise, and confirmed by the holy and happy experience of all his people. Hence they feel this to be the principal attraction when they assemble together in his name. They love the habitation of his house, because it is the place where his honour dwelleth.

But what means this law of the temple to regulate the attendants in their ingress and egress? "He that entereth in by the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate; he shall not return by the

way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it."

First, it was to prevent confusion, and to keep order in their comings and goings. God is not the God of confusion, but of peace. He has not deemed it beneath him to enjoin, "Let every thing be done decently and in order." He is the example of what he requires—order pervades all his works. The heavenly bodies are called "the army of heaven," to signify not only power but discipline; not only multitude but arrangement—"He brings out their host by number, he calleth them all by names." When Peter went into the sepulchre, he saw "the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." This proved how unlikely it was that the body could have been stolen away in haste and fear, either by foes or friends; and shows the presence of mind and calmness with which our Saviour left the tomb—but does it not also show that he did nothing negligently and disorderly? All greatness, in proportion to its degree, demands order. Surely not only holiness but decorum becomes God's house for ever. How far this is often displayed in our assemblies, especially in entering and departing, we leave observers to judge.

Secondly, to express respect and reverence. It is deemed only polite and becoming for persons in leaving a room not to turn their back on the company. Courtiers always leave the presence of the king with their faces towards him—The very thing God here requires for himself. He "will be sanctified in all that come nigh him." "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." The prohibition here by an outward and visible sign, shows the inward and spiritual obeisance and homage his infinite majesty demands and deserves. He complains of the want of it: "They have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction." Therefore, says he, to express their punishment under the same image with their sin: "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity."

Thirdly—That you are not to turn back in serving God, but to go forward. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "But," says the Apostle, "we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul"—that is, who "continue in the faith," "to life everlasting." We are not even to look back; but to say, with Paul, "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Fourthly—That we never go out of God's house as we go in. This was true of the Jews locally, it is morally true of us. As the departure of these worshippers was remote from the place of their entrance, so we withdraw from his ordinances further from heaven or hell than we entered in; less meet for the former, or more prepared for the latter. Ministers are a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one they are the savour of life unto life; but to the other they are the savour of death unto death.

Who believes this? who trembles at the thought? Who earnestly, constantly prays, that our coming together, "may be for the better and not for the worse?"

MARCH 11.

"*The rich and the poor meet together.*"
Prov. xxii. 2.

When we think of the universe, we are immediately struck not only with the number of creatures in it, but the variety. If we enter heaven, instead of sameness we find "thrones and dominions, principalities and powers," angels and archangels. "There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory." "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds." What an amazing diversity is there in the human species! No two persons are so perfectly alike in voice, form, and feature, as to be undistinguishable by close and accurate comparison. And yet all these constitute one and the same kind of beings; and the accordances among them are far superior in number and importance to their inequalities. Solomon remarks this, and says, "The rich and the poor meet together."

He mentions, "the rich and the poor," not exclusively, for there are many other human distinctions; but specifically. He specifies these for two reasons. First, because "the rich and the poor" are the most common and general division of mankind. They are everywhere to be found; and comprehend many more than any other discrimination. Secondly, because they are also the most influential division. What is there the multitude dread so much as penury, or desire so much as affluence? How many are there who would rather be wicked than poor, or rich than pious! How much cleverer, and hand-

somer, and even younger is a woman with a fortune than without one! How much more is a man listened to, whatever folly drivels from his lips, if he has a large income! How do the revolted tribes of Israel worship the golden calves! But "the rich and the poor meet together;" and if it be asked how? and where? we answer,

In their original. Hence Solomon adds, "the Lord is the maker of them all." We are the clay, and he is the potter, and we are all the work of his hands. When Job speaks of his man servant, he therefore asks, "Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" We have not only "one father," as God is the sole creator, but as Adam is the only founder of our race. Some have talked of Preadamites; but the Apostle speaks of "the first man Adam:" and says, "God has made of one blood all the nations of men." This is not a mere truth but a useful one. It renders us all intimately related to each other. It is the cure of envy, pride, unkindness. Wherever I see a human being, I see a brother.

In their dependence upon God. In him all live, and move, and have their being. This is as true of the rich as of the poor. Yea, the more we possess, the more dependent are we.

In their mutual need of each other. If the poor need the wages of the rich, the rich need the service of the poor. The king is served by the labour of the field. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary."

In their fallen condition. They have turned every one to his own way; but all have gone astray. All have sinned. There is none righteous; no, not one. All therefore are guilty before God: all are unfit for his kingdom without being made new creatures; and all are equally incapable of recovering themselves from their lapsed estate.

In the work of their salvation. There is only one name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved. All are washed in the same fountain. All are healed by the same remedy. All are justified by the same blood. All are renewed by the same Spirit.

In the means and ordinances of divine grace. The rich and the poor meet together in reading the same Bible; in kneeling before the same Throne of Grace; in hearing the same servants of the most high God; in surrounding the same table of the Lord, and partaking of the same emblems of the body and blood of Christ. In the holy communion, the rich receive no better bread and wine than the poor; and as there is no preference in the sign, so there is none in the thing signified—"It is the common salvation."

In liableness to the same calamities of life. Family bereavements, bodily pains, eclipses of reason—how numerous the ills that flesh is heir to!—befall the high as well as the low. Yea, if there be any difference, there is on the side of the former, more exposure to assault and more acuteness in enduring.

In the sentence of mortality. In this war there is no discharge. Death is the way of all the earth. The grave is the house appointed for all living. "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master." "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

In the proceedings of the last day. None are so little as to be overlooked; none are so great as to be excused. I saw, says John, the dead, small and great, stand before God. We must all, says the Apostle, appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Thus the rich and the poor meet together. What inference should we draw from this fact? Read the next article.

MARCH 12.

"*The rich and poor meet together.*
Proverbs xxii. 2.

WHAT is the inference to be drawn from this fact? The subject is capable of abuse, and fertile of improvement.

It would be foolish to conclude from it that all conditions are alike in themselves, or with regard to us. As if a man was no more favoured who resided in a comfortable dwelling, than one who had not where to lay his head. Our Saviour himself said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" and surely this shows at least one advantage the possessor has over the destitute. We teach our children to say,

> "Not more than others I deserve,
> Yet God hath given me more"—

And are we not to be thankful for the exemptions and indulgences by which we are distinguished? On the other hand, if we are deprived of certain outward comforts, we are required to submit to the will of God; but the submission does not imply indifference of mind: yea, the submission would not be a virtue, unless we were allowed to value what we are called to resign. The religion of the Bible is never enthusiastical; it never demands the sacrifice, but the sanctification of humanity and common sense.

But there is the inference of faction as well as of fanaticism—"The rich and poor meet together"—"Therefore give up the ranks of life, and let us have an equality." A certain equality if you please; that is, an equality of right to unequal things. Let the

cottage have as full a right to protection as the mansion; and the peasant's cart be as sacred as the nobleman's carriage. This is reasonable and righteous; and this privilege we enjoy under the laws of our wise, just, and happy constitution. But it is far different with an equality of condition and possession. Indeed the advocates for this doctrine do not plead for it in all cases. You never find them zealous to level up, but only to level down. They would reduce those above them, but leave unraised those that are below them—Their servants must remain servants still. The absurdity of this principle is so great and obvious, that it seems unworthy of being reasoned with: otherwise we might observe—That such an equality is impossible: if men were made equal to-day, they would be unequal to-morrow, owing to the difference in their understandings, their diligence, and their self-denial—That it is clearly the will of God that distinctions of rank and circumstances should prevail: hence in his word he has described the duties of superiors and of inferiors; and commanded us to render to all their due—And that it is better there should be such distinctions, as they call upon men for many virtues, the exercise of which would be impossible in a state of equality.

Yet it is desirable that these distinctions should not be excessive, or carried to their extremes. The welfare of the community consists much in the various gradations between the very rich and the very poor. And surely it is not favouring the levelling scheme, to oppose a state of things in which some have every thing and others nothing. Let there be poor as well as rich, but let them not only exist but live; let there be poor, but let them have employment and food and clothing. Where this is not the case, a country has retrograded, something wrong has entered, and till it be rectified there can be no solid and lasting peace or safety.

The truth should also lower the impression of these distinctions upon our minds. This should be felt, First, in judging others. Let us not only or principally regard them by outward and adventitious claims, but by their moral and religious worth. Character is independent of circumstances. In our eyes let a vile person be contemned, however rich; and let us honour them that fear the Lord, however poor. Yet, says Solomon, the poor is despised of his neighbour, but the rich hath many friends. Secondly, in judging ourselves. Let us not suppose that we are nothing if we are poor. A proper self-respect is as far from pride as it is from meanness, and is even a source of duty. If we are poor, let us remember we are not overlooked; that we are not excluded from any thing essential to our happiness; that we are not prevented even from acquiring greatness and dignity. We can be great in the sight of the Lord. We can gain the unsearchable riches of Christ. We can be greater conquerors than Alexander. We can appear in a glory that will eclipse the splendour of the universe. The poor have the gospel preached unto them.—Let us not imagine we are every thing if we are rich. There are many foolish as well as hurtful lusts which attend wealth. Let us beware of them, and not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. We may be rich, and yet weak and mean and wicked and miserable. Let us not be proud of our condition. Who made us to differ from others? He who can easily bring us down: he who will soon call us to give account of our stewardship. Shall we disdain others? He that despiseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that hath pity on the poor happy is he. Our wealth is not designed for hoarding or extravagance; but that we may give to him that needeth in all good things. If the clouds be full, they empty themselves upon the earth.

MARCH 13.

"*I withheld thee from sinning against me.*"
Genesis xx. 6.

So said God to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, when he sent to take Sarah, Abraham's wife. But it will truly apply to every individual of the human race, though not in the same circumstances.

All sin is against God—There is a propensity in man to the commission of it—and God's agency is necessary to restrain us from it. Some of our fellow-creatures have gone great lengths in iniquity; and have acted more like incarnate demons than human beings. These show us what our depraved nature is capable of, when placed in conditions favourable to temptation, and affording both opportunity and power. And yet even these have *some* restraints. The worst characters that ever lived never committed a thousandth part of the wickedness they would have committed had they not been checked and hindered. If God did not interpose there would be no living in a state of society. And the interposition of God is to be seen even in the laws and provisions of civil government. A magistrate is a terror to evil-doers. The gallows, the prison, the pillory, the stocks, are not only instruments of justice, but means of grace; and while we lament the necessity, we are thankful for the use of them.

Various are the ways in which God withholds us from sin. He has numberless providential precautions. Sickness has interrupted a course of iniquity which health would have continued. Worldly losses have led to the abandonment of schemes which vanity and pride had been devising. What Christian has not in some instances gone astray, and

whose experience has not enabled him to explain the threatening or rather the promise: "Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now?" A thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, saved Paul from being exalted above measure through the abundance of his revelations. David had been insulted by Nabal, who was such a son of Belial that no one could speak with him. He deeply felt the provocation, and was upon the road resolved to avenge himself. But Nabal had a wife who was as kind and prudent as she was beautiful; and upon the report of the approaching danger she hastened to meet David with a present, and a soft answer, which turneth away wrath. And what was the happy result? "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." How much evil has often been prevented by a wise and seasonable reproof! Faithful are the wounds of a friend. How many have had reason to bless God for a pious education! How much do they owe, in their preservation from sinful courses or actions, to the impressions of early sentiment, the influence of a father's example, the recollection of a mother's tears, and the Scriptures which had been lodged in the memory! There are restraints from domestic discipline and devotion. Can a man who says, with Joshua, "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord," and who performs family worship every morning and evening, act like others? Does a man make a profession of religion? He is bound to avoid things which others may think themselves at liberty to indulge in. Is he a minister or an office-bearer in the Church? What a safeguard becomes the reputation, the consistency that he *must* maintain! Some persons are averse to things which gender an increase of moral obligation; but we ought to value a state or a station in proportion as it tends to rescue us from sin. How often have men been checked on the brink of evil by a passage in some book, or by the address of the preacher in a sermon! How does God withhold men from sinning by the power of conscience! The advantage of this principle, which it is so difficult to subdue or to silence, is unspeakable. It operates in a thousand instances where human legislation has no effect. Tyrants who have found themselves above law, and secret transgressors who have trusted in their concealment, have yet trembled before this monitor of God within. But the chief and the best way in which God restrains us from sin is by the operation of his grace. If a man has a thievish inclination, it is well to put him out of the way of temptation; but this does not make him honest in design, though it keeps him innocent in conduct. The great thing is to have the disposition to sin mortified; and this is the experience of those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds. They are made to abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good. Some who avoid sin would be glad to indulge in it if their safety or advantage would allow of it. But how shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

We know not how much we owe to God for his preventing and restraining grace; nor can we know while we are in this world. But we surely know enough for two purposes: to make us candid, and to make us thankful. Who can tell how far we should have resembled those we now condemn had we been placed in the same circumstances, and been exposed to the same excitements; or had God left us to ourselves? "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."

MARCH 14.

"*I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.*"—John xi. 15.

Here we see, not only that our Saviour is alive to the welfare of his disciples, but that there is nothing he is so much concerned to promote in them as their faith. Some undervalue faith; yea, they seem to be afraid of it, as if it were injurious to holiness and good works! But we here see our Lord's estimation of it. He knows that it is the source from which flow all the streams of consolation and obedience; the tree which bears all the fruits of righteousness. Every thing in religion flourishes only as this prospers. We are also reminded—that we are slow of heart to believe—and that faith is no easy thing. They who think otherwise evince that they have never yet seriously made the trial. There is not a Christian upon earth, but in the attempt has often cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Even the Apostles, who had been so long with him and had seen his glory, said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. These disciples had already believed, or they would not have left all to follow him: but it seems they did not believe sufficiently. Faith therefore admits of degrees. Accordingly we read of

little faith," and of "great faith;" of those that are "weak in the faith," and of those that are "strong in the faith." We should be anxious that our faith, like that of the Thessalonians, should grow exceedingly, becoming more and more clear in its views, and firm in its reliance, and bold in its professions, and active in its agency, and heroical in its sacrifices—unto the perfect day.

The Saviour can accomplish his purposes in a manner peculiarly his own. "I am glad for your sakes I was not there," to the intent ye may believe. They would have said, he ought to have been there and succoured so dear an object. All the friends of Lazarus would have supposed that as soon as ever he was informed of his affliction he should have hastened to the scene of distress, and at least have expressed his sympathy. How eagerly did the sisters long for him! How did their hearts bleed over his delay! How often, wringing their hands, did they look out of the window; and send a servant to look down the Galilean way—"Where is he? If he comes not soon, it will be too late"—And now he has breathed his last—and the house is filled with wonder, perplexity, and grief. Even when he arrives they can hardly forbear reflection—"Lord," said Martha, "if thou hadst been *here*, my brother had not died"—Mary also complained in the same way. But hear him. "All has been proper and necessary. I know what I have done, and why I have done it. *I* know it now, and you will know it soon. Then *you* will be glad with me. Then you will see that it was far better that Lazarus should be raised from the dead after he had lain in the grave four days, than have been only recovered from a bed of sickness."

Thus he brings the blind by a way that they know not. His thoughts are as much above our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth. Joseph's case at first seems very hard; and many would have expected that the Lord's love to him would have kept him from being thrown into the pit and sold into Egypt. But I am glad it did not, for his own sake, and the sake of his father's house, and the surrounding countries, and the Church of God in all ages. What would have been lost by the prevention of his calamity? The God they served continually was able to save the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace. But I am glad he did not—and they are glad now—and were glad after their escape—and were glad even while they were walking loose in the midst of the fire with the Son of God. The same may be said of Job. We have seen the Lord, to use his own language, taking him by the neck and shaking him to pieces: but we have also seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercies. And with regard to ourselves—Is it not well for us that things were not always according to our mind? Has he not often advanced our welfare by events which seemed perfectly adverse to it? We were tempted to charge him foolishly and unkindly; yet after a while we perceived how in the dispensation his wisdom and kindness were peculiarly at work for our good. And what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Let us therefore, when our notions and his schemes disagree, distrust our own judgment and confide in the rectitude of his conduct. Let us not think of regulating his sun by our dial, but our dial by his sun. Let us not judge of his word by his providence, but of his providence by his word. Let us not judge of his heart by his hand, but of his hand by his heart. Where can we find his heart to judge by? In the promises—in the cross—he loved us and gave himself for us. Before we undertake to amend, let us be assured that there is something wrong; and before we censure, let us at least understand. Who knows what is good for a man in this life? How liable we are to err, from pride, from worldly-mindedness, from impatience, from unbelief! Let us judge nothing before the time. He will give a good account of himself at last; and bring us over to his own mind. But till we walk by sight, let us walk by faith, and believe now, what we shall know then—that "his work is perfect, his ways are judgment." "He hath done all things well."

MARCH 15.

"*I have set the Lord always before me.*"
Psalm xvi. 8.

David could only set the Lord before him mentally, or as an object of contemplation; for "no man hath seen God at any time." And when he says he had *always* done this, the meaning is, not that he was always actually thinking of him. This would have been impossible. Our powers are limited. We have bodies, we have connexions, we have callings; and these demand a share and a large share of our attention. And we are not to be slothful in business. And we are not to abandon society, and retire into cells to be always praying in sight of a skull and a crucifix—This is not to fight the good fight of faith, but to flee from the field: this is not serving our own generation, but deserting it; this is not letting our light shine before men, but putting it under a bushel. Yet it implies the prevalence of a fixed belief of the being and nearness of God—a frequent excitement of ourselves to take hold of God—and the regular use of the means which bring God to remembrance, such as prayer, reading the Scripture, hearing the word, and meditation. By these, under the Divine influence, a state of mind is produced, in which the spirit of devotion actuates us even in the absence of its forms, and we habitually and easily recur

to God in our thoughts wherever we are, and however we are engaged—Thus we can set the Lord always before us. And there are four ways in which you should do this.

First, Set the Lord always before you as your protector. This is the peculiar though not the only reference of David, and therefore he adds, "He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." The word virtue, which at first signified bravery, valour, is now used for all moral excellence: and the reason is, because it is necessary to it. You have no hold of a man who is destitute of it, either in avoiding evil or doing good. Bunyan therefore, with as much truth as genius, places all his pilgrims for the shining city under the conduct of Greatheart. Courage is not only necessary for a martyr: every Christian is called to suffer and do the will of God in a thousand cases where cowardice would fail. Perhaps there is not a simpler maxim, or one more readily and universally admitted than this, "we ought to obey God rather than men;" and yet who could fully act upon it for a day together in a world like this without moral heroism? Our religious course is a constant warfare; and when we think of our own weakness, and the number and qualities of our enemies, we should tremble: but trembling unfits for action: a soldier must have courage. How is firmness and confidence to be obtained? Set the Lord in his presence and perfections and covenant-engagements always before you: and hear him saying, Fear not, for I am with thee—and out of weakness you will be made strong—and like Moses, you will endure as seeing him who is invisible.

Secondly, Set the Lord always before you as your leader. Your way is not only dangerous but perplexing: and you are not only weak but ignorant—How much you need a guide! How earnestly did David pray for divine direction: "Lead me in thy Truth and guide me." How did he rejoice in the prospect of it: "This God is our God, for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." The Jews left to themselves could not have found their way in a large pathless desert; but "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day or night." Thus his goodness met their necessity, and relieved them from all anxiety. This guide determined the direction, and the continuance of all their journeyings; nor ever disappeared till by a strange and varying but always a right way, it brought them to a city of habitation. Events are not this pillar to us, but the written word. This is "the lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our paths;" to which we do well to take heed. How much depends upon a wrong step! How liable are we to err! How often have we gone astray! How much have we suffered from our perverseness or rashness! How much more should we have suffered had he dealt with us according to our desert in not asking counsel of him! Let us not lean to our own understanding. Here is the commandment with promise; "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Thirdly, Set the Lord always before you as your example. The advantages of example are great; and God himself comes down and condescends to go before us, calling upon us to be holy as he is holy; to forgive as he forgives; to be merciful as he is merciful. We were made in his likeness, and our renovation in Christ is our being renewed after his own image. Our happiness results from the perfection of our nature; and the perfection of our nature consists in its resemblance to the divine—"Therefore be ye followers of God as dear children."

Fourthly, Set the Lord always before you as your observer. Nothing escapes his notice. All he sees he records; and all he records he will bring into judgment. Do we believe this? It is true, whether we own it or deny it, that he is about our path and our bed, and understands our thought afar off—But do we believe it? Surely faith in such a truth must have some influence. And how useful must that influence be! A heathen philosopher admonished his disciples to imagine that the eye of some illustrious personage was always upon them. What was the eye of Plato, or Cato, to the eye of God? If while you were careless in company, some prominent individual should enter, whose approbation it would be important for you to acquire, how would his presence regulate your behaviour, and correct your speech! What a stimulus would it be to zeal; what a check to sin; what a motive to sincerity; what a relief under reproach; what a solace in affliction; what a duty; what a privilege—to realize Hagar's conviction, "Thou God seest me!"

MARCH 16.

"*Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*"—1 Pet. ii. 6.

"BEHOLD," is a note of attention and wonder. It shows that the subject introduced is worthy of our regard. The subject here is a representation of the importance of the Saviour, and the advantage his people derive from him. He is laid in Sion for a foundation—

"A chief corner-stone." Such a stone is designed to sustain, and on him depends, the salvation of the whole Church. It also unites as well as supports. And in him are united deity and humanity, the Old and New Testa-

ment, Jew and Gentile; we are all one in Christ Jesus—

"Elect"—Chosen for the place and the purpose. Nothing is casual in the common affairs of life, much less in the restoration of sinners. All here, especially as to the accomplisher, is transacted according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. God knew what the immensity of the undertaking required, and found it only in the Son of his love—"All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ"—

"Precious"—Deserving of the destination and the honour. Here is the difference between him and us. He chooses us, not because we are precious, but to make us precious; not because we are holy, but that we may be holy: and if ever we enter heaven, it will be upon terms of mercy. But his appointment resulted from his fitness. He entered heaven upon terms of merit, pure and absolute merit: and therefore the angels proclaim with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." But if the word "precious" is significant of excellency, it also imports endearment. Hence it is said, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands." And as he is dear to God, so he is dear to all his people. "To them that believe he is precious." They have their imperfections and mourn over them. But if he asked them individually, "Lovest thou me?" They could all answer—

> "Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
> My transport and my trust;
> Jewels, to thee, are gaudy toys,
> And gold is sordid dust.
>
> "All my capacious powers can boast,
> In thee most richly meet;
> Nor to mine eyes is light so dear,
> Or friendship half so sweet."

Such is the foundation. Observe the builder: "He that buildeth on him." We might have supposed that the metaphor would have been continued, and that Peter would have said, he that buildeth on him. But he conveys the same meaning without the figure. For as stones, as long as they continue in the quarry or remain loose upon the ground, are not actually parts of the edifice, neither indeed can be till they are placed on the foundation; so faith and faith alone connects us with Christ, and enables us to derive benefit from him. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Observe the blessedness he claims: he that believeth on him "shall not be confounded." He shall not be like the foolish man, "who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell." An emblem of those who hear the Saviour's sayings, and do them not; that is, of Antinomians: and an emblem of those who rely upon their own worthiness and works; that is, of self-righteous Pharisees. How confounded will these be, when their hopes fail them, and they are rejected at the very door of heaven—But when they "begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;" he shall answer, "I say I know you not whence ye are." It is the emblem also of those who seek happiness in the world. They are sure of disappointment, if not in obtaining their desires, which is frequently the case, yet in possessing them, and in the loss of them. Not so the believer. He is sure of gaining what he seeks after; the prize when enjoyed will exceed all his hope; and the good part which he has chosen shall never be taken away from him.

In the original passage from which the words before us are a quotation, Isaiah says, "He that believeth on him shall not make haste"—That is, he shall not be like a person overtaken and surprised by calamity, and in perplexed and tormenting eagerness to escape Thus it was with the world of the ungodly at the deluge. They despised the warnings of Noah while he was preparing the means of safety; but when the torrents began to fall, and the waters to overflow, in what hurry and confusion did they run to knock at the ark! How did they rush to the hills and mountains for safety! How climb the trees, and cling to them in despair, till they could retain their weakened hold no longer, and dropped into the abyss! Into what haste and confusion are the men of the world thrown when those losses befall them which threaten their only portion. But the believer though he feels affliction does not faint under it, and his mind is kept in perfect peace being stayed upon God. Into what haste and confusion are the wicked thrown when they apprehend that the messenger of death has laid hold upon them—But Simeon says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Into what confusion and horror will the tribes of the earth be thrown when the Judge of all shall appear in the clouds of heaven. But the Christian shall have "confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Filled with self-condemnation and self-reproach at the consequences of their vile and infatuated conduct, in having sacrificed their eternal all for what was worse than nothing, "many will rise to everlasting shame and contempt"—But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; *they* shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." O "visit me with" this "salvation!"

MARCH 17.

Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."—Genesis v. 24.

Took him from time to eternity, from earth to heaven, from the world of the ungodly to the innumerable company of angels, from a vale of tears to fullness of joy: took him immediately to himself without dissolution—"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

But what was this privileged being who was saved from the way of all the earth and the house appointed for all living? who, excused suffering "the pains, the groans, the dying strife," was changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! who, instead of being unclothed, was clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life! When an event so surprisingly and entirely singular takes place, it is natural and useful to inquire after the cause. And the Holy Ghost meets our wishes, and places before us the quality of a life that terminates so differently from that of all other men—Enoch WALKED WITH GOD.

And here we see that the best characters are the most easily recorded, and often furnish the fewest materials for history. There are not many particulars in the life of any individual very worthy of publicity and perpetuation; and generally if it be faithful, the larger the account of the actor, the greater the display of weakness or sin or suffering. Hence the folly of the voluminousness of modern biography. Hence the wisdom of the sacred writers in not dragging us after them through a thousand minute and uninteresting occurrences, but fixing the mind upon a few and important articles. The history of an Alexander, a Cæsar, a Napoleon, would fill many a page, and curse many a volume; while the simple, noble life of a man honoured above all humanity, is comprised in one sentence—Enoch WALKED WITH GOD.

And do we not here see wherein lies the true dignity of man, and what it is that supremely attracts the divine approbation? It is not worldly grandeur, riches, or power——Enoch is not famed for these. It is not even gifts—Enoch was indeed a prophet, and announced the Lord's coming to judgment. But his greatness in the sight of God arose not from his inspiration, but from his moral excellency, holiness, and grace. The low estimation in which God holds great talents and endowments may be inferred from his imparting them so sparingly. Were they so necessary as some imagine in the affairs of the world and the Church, he could easily furnish them—and he *would* do it; for in his economies—things are common in proportion as they are indispensable. It also appears from the character of those on whom they are frequently conferred. They are not dear to God, nor can he take pleasure in them though he employs them. What was Balaam with his sublime predictions? or Judas with his miracles and signs! "Though," says Paul, "I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Here we are always erring—we covet earnestly those gifts which are confined to a few, and are seldom sanctified to the possessor, while we are careless of those graces which are accessible to all, and which always accompany salvation. That life which was so distinguished by the Judge of all; that life which was only one remove from glory; that life which opened at once a passage for soul and body into the heaven of heavens, was not placed in circumstances above our reach, nor did it consist in any thing unattainable by the poorest and meanest among us—It was WALKING WITH GOD. Real greatness does not depend upon the things we do, but upon the mind with which we do them; and the Lord looketh to the heart. The career therefore of true glory lies open to all; to the servant as well as to the master; to the subject as well as to the monarch. All cannot be learned; but all may be taught of the Lord. All cannot enjoy civil freedom; but all may possess the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And the poor of this world may be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet the life of Enoch by no means passed in abstraction from society and business, or favoured that superstitious sanctity which refuses the allowed enjoyments of nature and providence. A proper use of our creature comforts is compatible, not only with the sincerest, but the strictest godliness; and falls in with the design of him who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. Enoch, who sustains such an exalted character, was not an ascetic, or recluse—he married earlier than any of his patriarchal brethren, and had sons and daughters. It is not the religion of the Bible that drives men into caves and dens of the earth, or that teaches them to counteract the destinations of Providence, or to oppose the nature that God has given them—It is the religion of anti-christ that represents as impure what God has declared to be pure: it is a seducing spirit that decries what God not only permits but enjoins as honourable in all; it is a doctrine of devils that forbids to marry and commands to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thankfulness of them which believe and know the

truth—Is a wretched dronish monk in his cell, with his horsehair, skull, and hour-glass, a more amiable, a more useful, a more *holy* being than Enoch at the head of an early family, filling up his station, and serving his generation by the will of God?

If however some entertain ideas of his life too rigid, others may have views of it too lax, limited, and low. His religion was not confined to morality. Morality is not to be undervalued. There is no piety without morality, but there may be morality without piety. We commend a discharge of the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures: but this is only our walking with *men*. Our greatest relations connect us with another Being; with him we have principally to do—Godliness consists in our walking with *God*. Some are not vicious, but they never reverence the Sabbath, or attend public or private devotion. They owe no man any thing; but they rob God. They are good neighbours, but God is not in all their thoughts. They have no confidence in him, no communion with him. They are not renewed after his image. They are not followers of him as dear children, nor walk in love as Christ also loved us.

Such was the religion of Enoch. And blessed are they who like him walk with God. They must not indeed expect to be translated as he was. Yet as to its sting and its curse, Jesus has abolished death. He tells his followers, "If a man keep my sayings he shall never see *death*." With regard to him death is so changed in its nature, and so blessed in its effects, that it does not deserve the name —No, he shall not die, but only go home; only fall asleep in Jesus; only depart to be with Christ which is far better. His body also will be changed and fashioned like the Saviour's own glorious body; and so will he be for ever with the Lord. The issue therefore is the same—And this is the grand thing. And if I am not to reach the blessedness by a miraculous transformation, but by an accident, or a disease—it is enough. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

MARCH 18.

'Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield."—Psalm xxxiii. 20.

THERE may be the form of godliness without the power. But the religion of the Bible has to do with the "soul." The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth—And

> "In vain to heaven we lift our cries,
> And leave our souls behind."

In noticing the subject of the exercise here encouraged, it may be observed that it is said —not our souls—but "our soul"—as if they all had only one. And what is the language of God by the prophet: "I will give them one heart and one way." And thus the two disciples going to Emmaus exclaimed, upon their discovery and surprise, "Did not our heart burn within us?" And thus in the beginning of the Gospel it was said: "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." We have seen several drops of water on the table by being brought to touch running into one. If Christians were better acquainted with each other, they would easily unite. What wonder that those should be one-minded who, under the same influence, are feeling the same wants, pursuing the same good, employing the same means, looking for the same destination! And how suitable and wisely enforced is the admonition—"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

But the exercise itself is "waiting for the Lord." An exercise frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, and well understood by all believers. Their character as the heirs of promise, is derived from it; "blessed are all they that wait for him." It includes conviction—a persuasion that the Lord is the supreme good, the fountain of life, our exceeding joy; all in all. It includes desire—it is expressed by hungering and thirsting after righteousness, by panting after God, by fainting for his salvation. It includes hope—the degrees of this may vary, but some measure of it is necessary to the commencement and continuance of the exercise; and the exercise will be always influenced and enlivened accordingly as our hope is possibility, or probability, or confidence. It also includes patience—God is never slack concerning his promise. He never tarries beyond his own time; but he is often beyond ours: and in a state of expectation hours seem days, and days seem weeks, especially if we are pressed with difficulties, and our eagerness for enjoyment is great—Then hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Here is the trial; and here is the need of patience. But patience will restrain us from the hasty use of improper means of relief; and preserve us from charging God foolishly, censoriously, or unfaithfully; and from sinking in the day of adversity; and from abandoning the throne of grace; and saying, why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Hence "it is a good thing that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord: for the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him"—

And thus the church is here encouraged: "He is our help; and our shield." He is Their *help*. They need aid; and they feel

their need; and they increasingly feel it as they advance in their religious course. They do not complain of their duties, or murmur at their trials; but with the knowledge they have of themselves, they often fear whether they shall ever discharge the one, and endure the other as becomes their profession. And they would not if left to themselves. But they are not left to themselves. They have a *divine* helper whose resources are infinite. Through his strengthening of them they can do all things; and as it is with their work, so it is with their sufferings—

> "He hears them in the mournful hour,
> And helps them bear the heavy load."

And he is "a very present help in trouble" —easily found—always near them—always within sight—or within call—and while they call he will answer—and say, "Here I am!"

He is also their *shield*. They are not only weak, but exposed. They are in an enemy's country. Their adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. He is yet more dangerous as the serpent; and we read of his depths, wiles, and devices. They are surrounded with the errors and vices, frowns and allurements of a world lying in wickedness: while owing to the remaining corruption of their nature, all their passions, appetites, and senses, may prove inlets to evil. But their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. The Lord is their keeper, and he is able to keep them from falling—Faith can realize this, and preserve the mind in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" Thus he is their benefactor as to good, and their preserver as to evil. What can they want more?

And can such an experience be kept to themselves? Impossible—"If these should hold their peace the stones would cry out." "O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield."

MARCH 19.

"*And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written*, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."—Rev. xix. 16.

THE name is expressive of dignity, greatness, and dominion. A more elevated idea of him could not be given comparatively, than to say he was higher than the highest, and governed those who governed the earth. The title has been worn by princes and popes; but the assumption was always founded in ignorance, pride, and impiety. To Jesus it truly and perfectly belongs. It may be considered two ways. First, as importing the *extensiveness* of his empire: his kingdom ruleth over all; and there are no beings in the universe but are either his subjects or slaves. Secondly, as referring to his connexion with the personages here mentioned: he is "the King of *kings*, and the Lord of *lords*." They are all amenable to his authority, and will be judged at his bar. They are all raised up by his power. They are all controlled by his providence. They all subserve his designs.

But where is the name worn? "Upon his vesture and upon his thigh:" that is, upon the part of the vesture which covered the thigh. His ways are not our ways. This is not the place where we should have looked for his *name*—the thigh is the place where hangs the *sword*. It is—and this is the very reason why his name is found *there*. It reminds us that his kingdom is not of this world: then would his servants fight: but now is his kingdom not from thence. And therefore, says the Apostle, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual. He had a sword; and John saw the sword; but it was a sword "going out of his mouth." This intended his word, and showed—not that he does not make war, but by what kind of instrumentality his victories are to be achieved. He meets with opposition both in gaining and in maintaining his dominion; and he rules in the midst of his enemies. But how? By the rod of his strength—the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

And how was it impressed? It was "written." As the vesture seemed dipped in blood, and appeared as of a deep crimson colour, the letters of the name it is probable were white and glistening. We know not in what language the name was inscribed. It was legible to John. Might it not be like his title on the cross, written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin? However this may be, it was written in order to be read and known. Many individuals pass us of whom we are ignorant. A nobleman may be ascertained by his livery or his arms. But he who has his name written even upon his vesture and upon his thigh must assuredly wish to be read and known of all men. Paul earnestly desired to know him; and esteemed all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. The reason results from two things —He is of unspeakable importance to the case of fallen man: no one can supply his place in any thing pertaining to our recovery: there is salvation in no other—And we can derive no advantage from him without knowing him. Without knowing him how can we love him? How can we put our trust in him? How can we repair to him for refuge or help? Therefore says God, "by his know-

ledge shall my righteous servant justify many." It is true that we are justified only by faith. But "how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed; and how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard!"

Hence the expediency, the necessity of making him known. Hence it is said, "I will cause thy name to be remembered in all generations;" and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas." Hence the Scriptures so clearly reveal him; and ministers so constantly cry, "Behold the Lamb of God." Hence his people pray, "Send out thy light and thy truth;" "that thy way be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations." Hence parents are required to teach him to their children; and every partaker of divine grace to say to his neighbour, "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

Let then this name written upon his vesture and upon his thigh be known and read of all men. Let the proud read it, and admire his condescension. He who stoops to our mean affairs, allows us to walk with him, tells all our wanderings, puts our tears into his bottle, makes all our bed in our sickness, is "the King of glory," and "the Lord of all"—Let

His enemies read it, and tremble. Who ever hardened themselves against him and prospered? "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is King of kings and Lord of lords."—Let

His friends read it, and dismiss all their fears. He is for them and with them. Their Redeemer is mighty; and will plead their cause. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day"—And what is there else that he is not able to keep! my reputation? my business? my health! my family! Is there a loss but he can turn into a gain? He can make all things work together for good to them that love him.—Let

Those who are tempted to deny him read it, and go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach. Let them remember not only their danger in being ashamed of him and of his words; but of their folly and weakness. Who is he they blush to own? and whose cause, and whose followers they deem it disgraceful to espouse? The King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let us all read it, and invite him to go on conquering and to conquer till his title is as fully acknowledged as it is justly deserved, and he shall reign for ever and ever. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things."

"Great King of grace, my heart subdue,
I would be led in triumph too:
A willing captive to my Lord,
And sing the victories of thy word."

MARCH 20.

"*Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your Father.*"—Gen. xlix. 2.

PRECIOUS in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints; and the scene is peculiarly worthy of our contemplation. It shows us the power of divine grace, and the value of the religion of Jesus in sustaining the possessor when every other support gives way, in comforting him when every other source of consolation dries up, and in irradiating him when every other sun of glory sets. Therefore says David, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." And even Balaam exclaims, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Jacob is here dying. He feels perfectly composed and satisfied as to the issue. We see him between two worlds, weary of time, and welcoming eternity; rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and saying, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." It seems to have been common in the patriarchal age for men, when dying, to pronounce a benediction on their offspring; and which, in many cases, not only admonished them of their duty, but foretold their destination—Thus "Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father." The words of dying men, especially of dying parents, are impressive and ought to be remembered. We have met with instances in which they have proved the power of God to salvation.

—Jacob begins with Reuben. Reuben signifies, "see a son." It was the exclamation of the joyful mother at his birth. So children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. But how little does a parent know in what disappointments his wishes and prognostics are to terminate! Reuben was his first-born, but he had forfeited the prerogatives of birth; and Jacob mentions them only to degrade his son from them. He shall have the privilege of a son, but not the rights of primogeniture—"Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed, then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch." It may seem strange and unkind in Jacob to revive this scandal now, when Reuben was weeping at the side of a father's dying bed; but he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost.

The sin had indeed been committed more than forty years before; but as nothing is future so nothing is past with God. We should hope he had long before repented of the deed; but there are crimes, the consequences of which are irreparable in this world. It was well if the guilt of his conduct was removed from his conscience—and with the Lord there is mercy; but the stain was indelible on his person and family. We are under a moral economy, and the wisdom of God has established connexions which even his goodness does not destroy. "Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt! So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away." It is useless to murmur at the divine dispensations. Forgiveness is attainable upon repentance; but they who trifle with character, must not expect to retain esteem and honour. They will be sure to hear of it again; and by providential corrections, the rebukes of friends, the upbraidings of enemies, and galling reflections of their own minds, they will often have reason to say, "My sin is ever before me."

Reuben had fits of good feeling and was naturally tender-hearted. When therefore his brethren were going to slay Joseph, he urged them to cast him into a pit, hoping to deliver him. And when they had left the place, and he to accomplish his purpose went secretly round to it and found him not, "he rent his clothes; and returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" And when they were all put in ward, and conscience led them to say one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother;" Reuben made this appeal: "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold also his blood is required." When too they were in danger of perishing for want through Jacob's unwillingness to let Benjamin go, "Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again." And had we a fuller history of his life, we should doubtless meet with many instances of a similar nature. But his goodness was as the morning cloud and early dew that soon passeth away. He had no self-government. He was the slave of his appetites and vile passions—"unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." No; without stability, there cannot be excellency. Without stability, there can be no character; for character is the effect and force of habit; and habit is produced only by constancy and consistency in acting. The proverb says, a rolling stone gathers no moss. A tree that is every year transplanted will not rise high, and grow strong, and bring forth much fruit. Even obstinacy is preferable to versatility: the one may perchance be well guided, and then it will firmly go on; in the other, there is nothing to guide. You may build upon a rock, but what can you do with a mound of sand?

In the next exercise, we will inquire wherein we should seek to excel; and in the following, wherein we should guard against instability?

MARCH 21.

"*Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*
Gen. xlix. 4.

—*Wherein should we seek after excellence?*

Let us seek to excel in *knowledge*. For the soul to be without knowledge it is not good. It is like a vessel without rudder or compass: or a body without an eye. Bacon is admired for saying, Knowledge is power. But Solomon had said, ages before, "Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." We are to have the innocency of the dove, but our Saviour himself requires us to combine with it the wisdom of the serpent. And while the apostle tells us in malice to be children, he adds but in understanding be ye men. And "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." It is lamentable to think how little judgment many professors of religion exercise, and how little information they have acquired, after enjoying so many advantages and for so long a season: so that when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God. How cloudy and confused and inconsistent are the views of some even with regard to the leading articles of the truth as it is in Jesus, by which if their safety is not affected, their comfort and welfare are injured.

Let us seek to excel in *sanctity*. Without obedience vain is our knowledge—"If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them. What is it to understand all mysteries and not bridle the tongue or govern the temper? To be orthodox and not moral? To be taught by the gospel every thing except to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world? Holiness is the beauty, the dignity of the soul. It is the radiance of the divine image. The design of God in all his commands, promises, dispensations, and influences is to make us "partakers of his holiness."

Let us seek to excel in *charity*. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," says the apostle,

"and yet I show unto you a more excellent way:" and this he immediately explains to be our acquiring and exercising the best graces, and principally charity; for the greatest of these is charity—love to God, and to our fellow creatures, and especially to them that are of the household of faith. By this all men are to know that we are the disciples of Jesus; and by this we ourselves are to know that we have passed from death unto life. This is that which the apostle so commends in the Thessalonians: "As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it towards all the brethren which are in all Macedonia." Yet he adds; "But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." And after many admonitions to the Colossians he says, "and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

Let us seek to excel in *usefulness*. If the unprofitable servant be a wicked one; and if every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit be hewn down and cast into the fire, what becomes of the religion and the hope of many? What good of any kind or of any degree do they perform—or even endeavour to perform? The endeavour indeed is execution with him who looketh to the heart, and says, where there is first a willing mind it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. It would be well if they deserved the commendation pronounced upon Mary; "She hath done what she could." But is this their case? Is there one of their powers or resources which they fully tax? What good work at the end of a day or a week have they ever to review; we do not mean with self-exultation, but with thankfulness to God that they do not eat, and drink, and sleep, and live in vain? In a world like ours, if we are disposed, we can never be at a loss for opportunities or means of doing good. And if we have no profession or business, we are the more bound to be useful, because we are the more free from care. Has not God promised that he will not only save his people, but make them a blessing? Is it not most delightful and honourable to resemble him who went about doing good? Be teachers of babes in our Sunday schools. Be eyes to the blind. Let the blessing of him that is ready to perish come upon you. Cause the widow's heart to sing for joy. Serve your generation according to the will of God; and "seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church."

Seek to excel in *reputation*. A bishop must have a good report of them that are without; and Christians are to be blameless, as well as harmless. They are not to be unconcerned about what people say of them, but to take heed that their good be not evil spoken of. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. It is valuable as an instrument of usefulness. It gains a man esteem. It procures for him confidence. It gives force to his advice, authority to his reproof, and influence to his example. If the world does not love some men, it cannot despise them. If it speaks against them, it is only in matters pertaining to the law of their God—which is their glory; or by magnifying infirmities from which no one professes to be free, or by misrepresenting their actions or motives—and against this it may be impossible to guard. But commonly after a while a consistent Christian puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and constrains those around him to bear their testimony in his favour. Demetrius had a good report of all men, as well as of the truth itself. And where the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men.

Much has been said upon the subject of emulation; and it has been often disputed whether it should be encouraged or repressed. It is certain that a disposition to excel others in beauty, dress, learning, riches, power, and honour, may prove very corrupting, and gender envy, hatred, falsehood, and strife. But there is a principle of this kind in our nature; and there is a course in which you may seek to surpass, without danger to yourselves or injury to others. We have placed it before you—Pursue it. Be ambitious to be great in the sight of the Lord. Be not satisfied with the reality of religion, but go from strength to strength; and be changed from glory to glory. Increase with all the increase of God. Do not compare yourselves with low models, but with the highest examples. Pray that you may do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven—And be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

MARCH 22.

"*Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*"
Gen. xlix. 4.

—*Wherein should we guard against instability?*

We should guard against it in our *governing aim*. If a vessel at sea is steering for no port, who is to determine whether the direction of the wind be favourable or unfavourable? If we are travelling at random, we move, but we do not journey; and it is a matter of indifference whether we turn aside or draw back; we make no progress unless we advance towards some end which we wish to reach. When a man has fixed his aim, his aim will simplify his conduct, arrange his actions, and give every thing a relation. Paul

says, "This one thing I do." He does not speak of a oneness of exertion, for he did a thousand things; but a oneness of purpose, which combined them all, and gave them the same direction. Now our determinate aim should be to please and serve God according to the injunction, "whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If here our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light. But if other aims also sway us, we shall be perplexed, distracted, and often at a stand. "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty." "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Let us guard against instability in our *views of divine truth.* Some have no fixed sentiments in religion; they are struck with every novel opinion; and are led after every "Lo! here; or Lo! there." But, says Paul, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." By grace he means the Gospel. We would not plead for bigotry or prejudice. We should be open to conviction, and judge according to evidence: but it is absurd to suppose we must remain all our days in uncertainty and doubt. If the poor have the Gospel preached unto them, it cannot be, if they are to receive it, very difficult as to its leading principles. And we are told that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Surely it is a reproach, and not a commendation, that some are ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. It is desirable and necessary that we should be able early to decide what is truth, that we may make use of it, and live upon it, and enjoy it. Who has ever seen a sound experience and a consistent practice in connexion with a loose creed? We should distinguish between what is circumstantial in religion, and what is essential. With regard to the former we cannot be too candid and liberal. But with regard to the latter let us be inflexible—Here "take hold of instruction, let it not go: keep her, for she is thy life."

Let us guard against instability in *church fellowship and attendance.* Some belong to no religious community. They are mere birds of passage, fleeing from one congregation to another. They enter no school, and therefore are subject to no rules of instruction. They are attached to no corps in the army of heaven; and therefore they have no discipline or drilling. They are not fellow-citizens with the saints, but spiritual vagrants. If all were like-minded, there would be no such thing as a church state, in which the members give up themselves to each other as well as to the Lord, communing together in privilege, co-operating together in exertions, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. They are also inconstant in their attendance on the means of grace in the same sanctuary. We would not have the house of God turned into a prison, and have people fettered to their own walls. Yet it is desirable, and for the promotion of godliness, for persons to have a spiritual home of their own. Some on the Sabbath-day morning have to determine where they shall go, and whom they shall hear. They are actuated by novelty and curiosity, rather than a simple desire to profit: and unwilling to endure any course of tuition which would do some justice to the word of God at large, they "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." Unstable as water, *they* never excel.

We should guard against instability even in our *temporal concerns.* This is inferior in some respects to the former articles, but it has a considerable degree of importance. People will judge of you in other things, by what comes under their observation: and you will be sure to lose respect in proportion as you appear to be versatile. Yet in some what variableness is there! What instability with regard to friendship—every month or year yields a new favourite, at whose shrine some old connexion is sacrificed. What instability with regard to domestics—what changes of servants! What instability with regard to residence—what changes of abode! What instability with regard to business—what changes of employment! What instability in the management of their affairs—what violations of engagement and punctuality—what confusion, what delays, what excuses—nothing is done decently and in order—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

And "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."

MARCH 23.

"*And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth shall go forth.*"—Ezekiel xlvi. 10.

This refers immediately to the temple worship. Read the verse preceding: "When the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship, shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate, shall go forth by the way of the north gate:

he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it." This regulates the attendance of the *people*. Then follows an order for the *prince*. He was to appear in the house of God as well as others; and regardless of his civil prerogatives, feel himself in sacred things on a level with his people, observing the same ordinances, entering the sanctuary at the same time, and continuing as long in as they. "And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth."

Various are the gradations of life, and it is not for the benefit of society that they should be abolished. But religion is not as some imagine, for the lower classes, or only a proper and necessary expedient to keep *them* orderly and obedient. Its institutions and exercises are binding upon the rich as well as the poor; upon the noble as well as the vulgar; upon masters as well as servants; and upon sovereigns as well as subjects. It is very *pleasing* and *becoming* in persons of quality to be seen going to the temple of God with their domestics, tenants, and poor neighbours about them. And superiors *ought* to be constant and devout in their attendance on public worship: yea, they are under *peculiar* obligations to do it. They are under an obligation arising from *gratitude:* for duty grows with benefits: and if they are more distinguished and indulged than others, they owe the more to their benefactor, and should be the more concerned to please and serve him; and not resemble vapours exhaled from the earth, that only darken and hide the sun that raised them. They are under an obligation arising from *influence*. They are more seen, observed, and followed, than persons in lower life. If they are irreligious and vicious, they take away shame and fear from others; and by their example they sanction, excite and encourage imitation. Morals as well as fashions are sure to work downwards. They are under an obligation arising from *self-interest*. Did they consider things aright, they would be sensible that none need the means of grace more than themselves. Their duty is great: and here they would find instruction, encouragement, consolation, and support, amidst all that is difficult and trying in their stations. And their danger is great. They are set in slippery places, and the prosperity of fools destroys them. They are in jeopardy from self-indulgence, and flattery, and vanity, and pride, and forgetfulness of God and eternity; and here they would be admonished and armed; here they would be reminded amidst their temptations, of their original, their dependence, their mortality, their end, and of the account they will have to render at the judgment-seat of Christ—But this page is not likely to reach many of the great—Otherwise we would thunder in their ear: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

But some suppose a reference here to another prince, even he who was to be ruler in Israel. The allusion is possible and pleasing. We say *possible;* for God's aim in his word is so comprehensive as to include all the lawful purposes to which any part of it is applied; and it is lawful to avail ourselves of every thing that will teach and preach Jesus Christ. And we say *pleasing* as well as possible; for so must the assurance be felt, *if* significant of him. And there is a conformity between him and his people; and in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren. Yet in all things too he has the pre-eminence: and is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. He could say, In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee: but he is more than their fellow-worshipper, more than their companion, more than their example, more than a man—He is lord of all.

—Observe his *title*—"The Prince." He is the only King in Zion: but he is "Messiah the Prince;" "the Prince of peace;" "the Prince of life;" "the Prince of the kings of the earth;" "a Prince and a Saviour"—

Observe his *residence*—"In the midst of them." This situation agrees with all the representations we have of him, and the state of his people requires it. He was in the midst of the burning bush; and hence it was not consumed. He was in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I will, says he, be not only a wall of fire round about them, but the glory in the midst of them. Sometimes kings reign over a country in which they do not reside, and which they seldom or never visit: and no earthly prince can be in the midst of his people so as to be heard and seen and approached at the same time by all. But the Lord Jesus is nigh unto all them that call upon him; and has said, Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. And

Observe therefore his *agency*—Wherever they go he attends them graciously, and the angel of his presence saves them. "When they shall go in, he shall go in; and when they shall go forth, he shall go forth." It is so as to their devotions. Do they enter the temple? When they go in, he shall go in—and they shall see his beauty, and behold his goings: for where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them. Or do they enter the closet? When they go in he shall go in—and manifest himself unto them. And how often can they say

"While such a scene of sacred joys
Our rapture'd eyes and souls employs;
Here we could sit, and gaze away
A long, an everlasting day!"

But they cannot be always in devotional engagements. They have many other duties to discharge: and must go forth to meet the claims of civil and relative life—But when they go forth he shall go forth; and be with them in the farm, the shop, the road, as well as in the church and the closet. It is true therefore as to the common concerns of life. If in the evening they retire to rest, or in the morning go forth to their work and their labour; if they enter their calling or withdraw; if they begin or finish an enterprise, he is still with them. Hence they are in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and acknowledge him in all their ways, and are safe, sanctified, and happy. "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul." "Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out."

It is also true with regard to their sufferings. When they enter these, they often fear they shall sink; but they do not enter alone —"I will," says he, "be with him in trouble." And he comes forth with them, or they would not come forth as gold, or be able to retain the lessons and impressions they received, and to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Wise Christians feel more need of his presence and grace when they are coming out of a trial, than when they are going into it; though in both they are indispensable.

And is there before them the valley of the shadow of death? It often dismays them. But they need fear no evil, for he is with them. Their friends indeed can attend them only to the entrance of it. But he will go with them into it, accompany them through it, and bring them out into a wealthy place. "When they go in, he shall go in; and when they go forth, he shall go forth"—He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." One place seems an exception. They shall enter Immanuel's land, the rest that remains for his people: but when he goes in with them *there*, he will *not* go out. But the reason is because *they* shall go no more out: but they shall be for ever with the Lord.

MARCH 24.

"*But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.*"—Psalm v. 7.

Let us make this noble resolution our own; and in order to this let us endeavour to understand it. Observe the *singularity* of the resolution. "Let others take their course, I have chosen mine. It is good for me to draw near to God. Him will I seek and serve. And though it is desirable to have company in religion, and I wish to bring all my fellow creatures to walk with me in the way everlasting, their determination will not influence mine—As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." Let us not be peculiar in little and lawful things; nor affect singularity for its own sake. This is always the mark of a vain but weak mind: the man wishes for distinction but cannot attain it by excellence, and so has recourse to eccentricity; he cannot excite notice by the goodness of his pace, and so tumbles in the road, or leaps through the hedge. But where truth and duty and conscience are concerned, singularity is a noble virtue; and no one shows such dignity of principle, and pureness of motive, and simple regard to the authority of God, as the man who goes forward according to his conviction, without the company and commendation of others, and especially when reproached and opposed by them. And them that honour me, says God, I will honour.

Mark the *object* of the resolution. It regards the service of God in the sanctuary. I will come into thine *house* in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I *worship* towards thy *holy temple*. David was fond of retirement, and was much alone in meditation and prayer. Yet he knew the closet was not to exclude the sanctuary, but to prepare for it; and therefore he could say, I have loved the place where thine honour dwelleth; a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. Though a king, he did not think it beneath his greatness to sanctify the Sabbath, and attend the gates of Zion; yea he knew he was the more bound to do it, from the eminence of his station, and the influence of his example. Though a man full of employment, who had to give audience to ambassadors, orders to officers, and instructions to ministers; and had to manage the affairs of a large and distracted empire; yet he had time for God's ordinances—for he rose early—and loved order, and such beings have leisure for every thing. Though a genius, a very wise man, a prophet, he did not neglect the institutions of religion, and say, I cannot learn more than I know already. Humility attends profound knowledge. Teach a wise man, and he will yet be wiser. He was a godly man; but under a notion of superior piety, he did not despise the means of grace; like some who say they never had so much communion with God in their lives as they now have; every day now being a Sabbath, every place a temple, every creature a preacher—Believe them not. God knows what is in man, and what is needful to him, and has appointed his ordinances for our welfare: and though a painted man does not want food, a living one cannot dispense with it. A real Christian feels his necessities and

deficiencies; and knows by experience where his heart has been enlarged, and his strength renewed. He has found God for a refuge in his palaces. Strength and beauty are in the sanctuary.

The *manner* in which he would accomplish the resolution is worthy our notice. It includes two things. He would do it impressed with a sense of divine goodness. I will come into thy house in *the multitude of thy mercy*. How can we reflect and not feel this? The worship itself is a privilege. It is a mercy that we have a sanctuary—It is a mercy that we have liberty to assemble together—It is a mercy that we have health and strength and leisure for divine worship—It is a mercy that we have a disposition to avail ourselves of the privilege—It is a mercy that we repair to the service, knowing that it is not a vain thing to seek the Lord, and able to plead the promise, I will make the place of my feet glorious. But we need not confine the subject. To creatures so unworthy and guilty as we are, every thing is mercy: the air we breathe; the water we drink; our food; our sleep. Let us think in what a multitude of mercies we come together; public and private; personal and relative; temporal and spiritual: redeeming mercies, justifying mercies, renewing mercies—Let us dwell on the plenitude of his undeserved favours, that we may not murmur or even complain of a few trials, but come before his presence with singing and praise.

He would also do it filled with holy veneration. And in *thy fear* will I worship toward thy holy temple. This fear is not dread, and therefore comports with the cheerfulness of which we have been speaking. The first believers walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost: and we are commanded to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. We are to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long—but God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of them that are about him. Nothing more becomes his majesty and purity, his omniscience and omnipresence. Nothing more becomes our meanness and vileness; and the importance of the work in which we are engaged; and the consequences depending. We sing and pray and hear for eternity. We are responsible for all our opportunities. We never leave the house of God as we enter it—How dreadful is the place! It is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven—and of hell! To some the word preached will be the savour of life unto life; to others it will be the savour of death unto death. Nothing is so likely to secure our edification by the means of grace, as a solemnity of mind in our attendance. And where it prevails, the eyes will not rove all over the place. Sleep and drowsiness will be excluded. We shall not leave the sanctuary with levity, and fall into vain and idle discourse. Nor shall we ever come to it without reflection and prayer.

MARCH 25.

"*I am in a strait betwixt two.*"—Phil. i. 23.

Nothing is more trying and distressing than a state of uncertainty, indecision, and perplexity—or being in a strait between opposing claims, one of which only can be chosen. What a strait was David in, when he had to choose between pestilence, and war and famine! And what a strait was Jacob in between his wish for relief and the fear of sending Benjamin!

Paul is here in a strait, but it is between two things, each of which is agreeable and inviting. We might have been sure that whatever weighed with *him* would be something pertaining to Christ. Accordingly *his* drawing was, on the one side the enjoyment of his Lord's presence in heaven; and on the other the serving of his people on earth. Let us notice the former of these—"Having a desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better."

The Apostle means death; but he avoids the name, and calls it a *departure*. We are much more influenced by *words* than we may imagine; and as there is so much to render death formidable, we should as far as possible soften it even in the representation. And the Scripture does this. It tells us that if a man keeps the sayings of Christ, "he shall never see death." Is he then exempted from the law of mortality? No: but death is so changed with regard to him, that it does not deserve the name. It is therefore a gathering to his people, a falling asleep, a putting off this tabernacle, a departure—"I long to depart." Does the Apostle refer to a mariner loosing anchor from a foreign shore to depart for his own country? or a traveller departing from an inn to which he has turned aside for a night to go on his way? or to a prisoner departing from his dungeon and chains to enjoy his freedom? or to a soldier departing for his peaceful home after his warfare is ended? The death of a Christian furnishes all these images and fulfils them. But how surely does the representation remind us of the complex nature of man! If nothing survived at death, death would be a cessation, not a departure. We do not say an animal departed this life. If we buried a beast we should not inscribe on a stone, "Here lies his body"—Here lies the whole of *him*. But over the grave of a man we say, "Here lies the body"—or, "Here repose the remains"—For "there is a spirit in man;" and when "the dust returns to the dust whence it came, the spirit returns to God who gave it."

The *effect* of this death is "to be with

Christ." It is obvious the Apostle supposed that a separate state immediately followed the dissolution of the body, as he says in another place expressly, "Absent from the body and present with the Lord." Had he expected that he should not be with Christ till the resurrection, his dying would have been of no advantage to him. It might have freed him indeed from his sufferings: but he is not speaking of what he should leave, but of what he should reach. In a blessed sense Christ was with him here; and this, with all his trials, was better than annihilation till the last day. It is useless to say the period would seem only as a moment to the individual—for this is not the question—the difficulty lies here—that let the term be long or short, such inaction and insensibility *could* not be better than the presence of Christ with Paul even in this life.

I love the very words the Holy Ghost useth. Paul does not say, I long to depart to be in heaven. This is his meaning—but he speaks in a way that while it expresses the blessedness, characterizes it also at the same time. To be in heaven is to be with Christ. Our Lord affirms this himself in his promise to the thief—"This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." And in his prayer for the disciples—"That they may be with me where I am to behold my glory." Is this our heaven? Could such happiness make us happy? Whatever that state be,.we must be prepared for it by a conformity to it in our views and feelings here. What a delightful prospect is the social intercourse of that world! If Socrates could comfort himself that he was going to Museus and other worthies that had lived before him, what is the attraction of a Christian, that he is going to join his own beloved connexions, and the martyrs, and the apostles, and the prophets, and the patriarchs, and the innumerable company of angels—and above all, "the Lord of all," the most wonderful of all characters, the most endeared of all benefactors, the most precious of all friends!

We have not only the nature and effect of this death, but the pre-eminency of the blessedness to which it leads. It is strongly expressed. It is "better"—"far better." Far better than what? It would be saying little to say that it was far better than his trials, far better than to be stoned at Philippi, than to fight with beasts at Ephesus, than to be a night and a day in the deep, than to be in perils among false brethren. It would also be little to say that it was far better than all his temporal comforts. These a Christian does not undervalue; yea he is grateful for them, and enjoys them with a relish peculiar to himself. But he has something even now superior to all outward good—The means of grace and the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But to be with Christ is far better than these: as the day is far better than the dawn, and the inheritance and the vintage are far better than the earnests and the first fruits only. Our communion with him here is distant and often intercepted—there it will be perpetual and immediate. We love the streams—but what is the fountain! We love the house of prayer—but what is the temple in which they serve him day and night!

> "Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love;
> But there's a nobler rest above:
> To that our labouring loves aspire,
> With ardent pangs of strong desire.
>
> "No more fatigue, no more distress,
> Nor sin, nor hell, shall reach the place;
> No groans to mingle with the songs,
> Which warble from immortal tongues."

MARCH 26.

"*Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.*"—Phil. i. 24, 25.

VOLTAIRE, in his letters to one of his confidential friends and admirers, more than once says, I hate life, and I dread death. How different were the views and feelings of Paul! He did not dread death, but could say, "I long to depart to be with Christ, which is far better." And so far was he from hating life, that he valued it as affording him opportunity to glorify his Saviour, and to serve his people according to his will. We have seen one part of his strait—Let us look at the other.

Whether he derived his persuasion from a knowledge that his bonds were manifest in all the palace, and that efforts were making in his favour by the saints in Cæsar's household, or from an inspired intimation, we cannot determine: but he was confident that he should not only escape death, but be released from imprisonment. Thus he would be debarred from a state which, as to personal enjoyment, he deemed far better than every thing else and intensely longed after, and yet he speaks of it with more than acquiescence. What an instance of self-denial was here! How backward are some to make any sacrifice in order to do good. They cannot forego a luxurious meal to furnish a poor family with a plain one. They cannot give up a little variety in dress to clothe a naked child. But Paul is willing to resign heaven itself, though he was sure it was his own, and every kind of suffering rendered it desirable—in order to be useful. Self-denial is the first lesson Christianity requires; and every part of it tends to inspire us with a disposition to look, not on our own things but also on the things of others. This was the mind of Christ. When he was rich, for our sakes he became poor. And the glorified who are now with him, and have drunk fully into his spirit, would be all ready were it the will of God, to leave their ecstasies, and come down again and live in this vale of

tears, year after year, to serve the cause of the Redeemer, and to promote the salvation of mankind.

We see also that Paul was conscious of his usefulness. Ignorance is not necessary to humility; much less affectation. A man need not deny his abilities, or acceptance, or success, though he ought to acknowledge from whom they come, and on whom they depend. A mother may have a lowly mind, and yet feel that her life is of importance to her rising charge, and the feeling is even a duty. A minister may be willing to enter into his rest, yet be more than reconciled to life, when he sees that many hang upon his lips who may be saved or comforted by him; and it would be folly in him not to be aware that he is a blessing. Paul said, "I am nothing—and so he was absolutely—but not comparatively and relatively." Am not I, says he, an Apostle? "Have I not seen Christ?" "By the grace of God I am what I am; not I, but the grace of God which was with me;" but, adds he, "I laboured more abundantly than they all." And he here makes no scruple to say, that the welfare of the Philippians and others depended upon his abiding in the flesh.

But wherein did he reckon upon being serviceable! Not only in the conversion of sinners, but in helping them much who had believed through grace—"For your furtherance and joy of faith." This is worthy of notice. It shows the importance of faith. Paul considered this every thing—not to the exclusion of holiness, morality, and good works; but as to the production of them, and their support and their increase. He knew that as faith prevailed, every thing in the divine life would prosper.

Some say there is no growth in grace. But the Apostles prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." The faith of the Thessalonians "grew exceedingly." And Paul was concerned for "the *furtherance*" of the faith of his beloved Philippians—that is, that it might be more clear in its views, more firm in its principles, more powerful in its influence, more appropriating in its confidence. He also wished not only for their furtherance, but "joy of faith." This joy they would constantly need; and it would be their strength. Jesus is the source of it, but faith is the medium. He is the well of salvation, but faith draws the water—"In whom, *believing*, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory"—We are "filled with all joy and peace *in believing*."

Such was Paul! He was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, and abhorred the worthy Name by which we are called: but he obtained mercy: and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant to him-ward in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. So that he could now say, "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"—"Christ is all and in all." Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

What an example is here! What zeal and yet what knowledge! What preparation for both worlds! What readiness to go! What willingness to stay if there was any thing more for him to do or suffer!

> "Behold the awful portrait, and admire.
> Nor stop at wonder. Imitate and live"

MARCH 27.

"*Am I in God's stead.*"—Genesis xxx. 2.

WHAT Jacob here says to Rachel, every creature to which we address ourselves will sooner or later say to us: "Am I in God's stead?" The doctrine we may derive from the words is this, NO CREATURE CAN BE IN THE STEAD OF GOD. But let us explain the doctrine by some distinctions and concessions.

Though no creature can be in the stead of God, God can be in the stead of any creature. David therefore at Ziklag, when deprived of all his substance and his relations, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." And the Church exclaims, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The sun may enable a man to dispense with a lamp, but the lamp cannot supersede the sun. The fountain is necessary to the stream, but not the stream to the fountain.

Though no creature can be in the stead of God to us, one creature may be in the stead of another creature. A minister may more than fill the void made by the removal of his predecessor, and may possess a double portion of his spirit. A child may be deprived of a father, and some kind patron may take him up, and educate him, and place him abroad in life, and fully repair his loss. A husband may seem inconsolable when deprived of the desire of his eyes; but soon after, another soft hand may wipe away his tears. One relation seems much more irreparable; it is that of a mother. Yet we ought not to indulge in general and indiscriminate reflections. There are mothers-in-law who are mothers in kindness; and step-mothers—that is—those who step into the place of real mothers, who fulfil the duties of the office, and are mothers indeed—and such can never be too much commended and praised.

Though no creature can be in God's stead, a creature may be in God's hand. He may be God's instrument, but cannot be his substitute. The instrumentality that God employs differs much from the instrumentality which men employ. Men employ instruments from

necessity, God employs them from choice. Men employ them from weakness, God employs them from wisdom. Men depend upon their instruments, God's instruments depend upon him. They are no more than he is pleased to make them. How then can they fill his place? They are nothing without his agency. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

The truth of this doctrine it would be easy to exemplify. Can any be in God's stead as a creator? This is Jacob's immediate aim in his reply—am I in God's stead, who hath withholden from thee the fruit of the womb? He is the sole author of existence; the former of our bodies; the father of our spirits; and by this he has an infinite distinction from all creatures—they are made, and he is the maker. Who can be in God's stead as a preserver? It is in him alone we live and move, as well as have our being. If preservation be not a continued creation, it is a continued agency. Were he to suspend his upholding influence for a moment, we should relapse into nothing. Can any be in God's stead as a redeemer? Who but he could say, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? He alone who required the sacrifice, could provide the lamb for a burnt-offering. He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. "Beside me there is no Saviour." Who can be in God's stead as a teacher? "Who teaches like him?" We are not only in darkness but blind—Who but he can give us eyes as well as light? We are not only ignorant but weak—Who but he can give us capacity as well as lessons? Who but he can bear with our infirmities? Who but he can make us wise unto salvation? Who can be in his stead as a sanctifier? Who but he can create in us a clean heart, aod renew a right spirit within us? "This people," says he, "have *I* formed for myself; they shall show forth *my* praise." Who can be in his stead as a comforter? Who can be a substitute for him in healing the broken in heart, and binding up all their wounds? Who can revive those who walk in the midst of trouble? Who can fill the valley of the shadow of death with joy unspeakable and full of glory?

Let us think of this fact, and be thankful that this only, this all-sufficient Being is accessible; and allows and commands us to "take hold of his strength." Let us think of it in reference to creatures—Let us think of it in *asking* for them. They may appear desirable; they may be useful; but let us never suppose that we *must* obtain them in order to happiness. One thing only is needful; it is an interest in God. Let us think of it in *possessing* them, and say with Watts,

> "To thee we owe our health and friends,
> Our wealth and safe abode;
> Thanks to thy name for meaner things,
> But they are not my God."

Let us think of it in *losing* them. We are allowed to feel but not to despair. Yet what idolaters are we! and it appears when our gods are taken away. Oh! if I should lose such a preacher! Oh! if that beloved connexion was removed—mine eye would no more see good. But the storm that carries away the stubble, does not destroy the estate. It was not a bad question the child addressed to her bereaved and weeping mother when she said, "Is God dead?" How strange would some of our feelings appear if they were expressed in words! Yet what did David think of this? "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."

MARCH 28.

"*Gentleness.*"—Gal. v. 22

Paul here speaks of gentleness, not as a natural temper, but as "the fruit of the Spirit." James also considers it as an attribute and character of inspired religion: "The wisdom that is from above is gentle." This is surely recommendation enough to induce us to make it the object of devout attention.

Gentleness is very distinguishable from weakness of mind, and the fawning of flattery. It requires us to give up no truth to abandon no duty. Principle and consistency are not only compatible with it, but necessary to it. Lead is too soft as well as too worthless to be stamped into coin and currency. You cannot polish a spunge, or a fungus; solid bodies only can admit the process; and the firmer *they* are, the better will they shine. But gentleness must exclude arrogance, insolence, violence, harshness, rudeness, and every thing offensive and painful that can be avoided with integrity and rectitude. There is an artificial mildness, and a studied softness of manner learned in the school of the world, that often covers baseness and ill-nature, and envy and hatred. But a Christian is to be an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. He is to be in reality what others are in appearance and pretence: he is from inward disposition naturally to exemplify what others from education or custom put on. And how lovely and engaging is that unaffected civility, that courtesy which springs freely from the state of the mind and heart under the renewing influence of divine grace! He that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. It recommends his religion

by adorning it, and gives him a thousand beneficial influences in dealing with his fellow-creatures. A man may wait even years before he has an opportunity for acts of high beneficence and extensive usefulness; but he can exercise gentleness every day and every hour; and contribute to the advantage and happiness of all that are about him. And does he not thereby equally befriend himself? Does it not preserve calmness and sunshine within? And are not all the mild and kind affections conducive even to the health of the body?

Let us therefore cultivate this gentleness. Let it enter our habits, and spread through our whole behaviour. Let it constantly actuate our temper, and regulate our speech. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from us with all malice, and let us be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Let us in all our religious concerns remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The servant of the Lord must not strive but be patient towards all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. The way to convince another is not to affront, and insult, and provoke him, and drive him to resistance; but to show him that you love him, and are only concerned to do him good. Some have no sooner expressed their belief that a man can receive nothing unless it be given him from above, than they condemn and reproach him for a destitution which, according to *them*, is not his guilt but his misfortune! Is a brother overtaken in a fault? Let us restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted. Have we occasion to reprove? Let us remember what was said of Leighton—He rebuked faults with such kindness and mildness that they were never repeated, not because the reproved were afraid, but ashamed to repeat them. As much as lieth in us let us live peaceably with all men; and resolve to act upon the lesson we teach our infants—

> "I 'll not easily offend,
> Nor be easily offended;
> What 's amiss I 'll strive to mend,
> And endure what can't be mended."

And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And ye masters, forbear threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven, and that there is no respect of persons with him. Gentleness indeed must peculiarly appear in our treatment of those who are placed under us. It is one of Lavater's aphorisms on man, and will, we are persuaded, be found without exception true—"If without living with him, or studying him, you would know a man at once, observe how he acts and speaks towards his inferiors." Towards his superiors and his equals he is guarded, but with his inferiors he is open and free—and if with *them* he assumes airs, and commands harshly, and answers roughly; if he swaggers, scolds, and threatens; if he tries to inspire fear rather than to gain love—he has a tyrannical and a villanous heart. A common observer would say—he is no gentleman; every thing in the gospel says—he is no Christian.

MARCH 29.

"*Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.*"—2 Sam. xv. 15.

This was said on the trying emergency when he was about to leave Jerusalem, to escape from the vile rebellion of Absalom. And it was well said. And it shows us what little reason David had to complain, all men are liars. With a few exceptions, no one ever had more attached and devoted adherents than he.

There is no spiritual meaning in the words. They intend no more than they express. But who can help thinking with what propriety they may be adopted by Christians, and addressed to Christ? He is their Lord and King. They profess to be his servants. He has the appointment of their word. And they should be ready to do his will without partiality as well as without hypocrisy—"Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint."

This is our reasonable service: and four things should excite, sustain, and increase this readiness.

First, the consciousness of our obligations to him. How much do we owe him! What has he not done for us? and in a way the most expensive to himself? He was rich, and for our sakes he became poor—

> "He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
> To raise us to his throne:
> There 's not a gift his hand bestows,
> But cost his heart a groan."

We can never discharge our obligations to a love that passeth knowledge. But we should be deeply sensible of them; and hold ourselves entirely at his disposal; and delight to do his will; and constantly ask, "*What* shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?"

Secondly, a persuasion of his right to appoint every thing pertaining to us. Not a right derived and limited like that of a master or a father to dispose of his servant or his child: but an original inalienable right—the right of an absolute proprietor—the right of a creator over a creature whom he called out of nothing, and who lives and moves and has his being in him.

Thirdly, a conviction not only that he has a right to appoint, but that his appointments are right—always wise and just and good. They may be sovereign, but they are not arbitrary. The reasons of them may be for a

time concealed, but they are worthy of his character. They are now satisfactory to his own mind, and when explained, they will draw forth our approbation and praise. We know not what is best or even good for us. We have made mistakes and suffered embarrassments enough when we have attempted to judge for ourselves, to convince us that the way of man is not in himself. But he cannot err. His understanding is infinite: and our wisdom and welfare require us to say, "The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us."

Lastly, a persuasion that our acceptance with him does not depend upon the place he assigns us, or the nature of the work he ordains us, but our submission to it. We are not answerable for our stations and offices; but for our conduct in them. We can serve the Lord in adversity as well as in prosperity; in a private as well as in a public capacity. A good actor on the stage may be seen in the character of a peasant as well as in that of a prince—it is not the part allotted him that calls forth the applause of the audience, but the manner in which he represents it. To be great in the world depends upon things over which we have frequently no control: but all may be great in the sight of the Lord: the hearer as well as the preacher; the servant as well as the master. He looketh to the heart; and if we are ready to do whatsoever he appoints, we shall have the testimony that we please God; and shall soon hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Such was the submission of Saul of Tarsus —"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Such was the temper of Samuel—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Such was the practice of David—"On thee do I wait all the day." And such is the readiness of angels—Though they excel in strength, they do his commandments hearkening unto the voice of his word. What pleases them is not the kind of work in which they are employed, but their having an opportunity of showing their regard to the pleasure of the employer. May his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!

MARCH 30.

"*Since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the Saints, and of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven*"—Col. i. 4, 5.

These were the grounds of Paul and Timothy's praise to God on the behalf of the Colossians. And they are all spiritual motives. Temporal blessings are not to be overlooked —But gratitude is to be wise, and to proportion its fervours to the value of the benefits conferred. And what are the good things pertaining to the life that now is, compared with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places? Much depends upon the nature of our gratitude. There is no man who does not sometimes thank God. But for what? A safe voyage; a good harvest; a recovery from sickness. All that awakens *his* heart is confined within the circle of time and sense. Christians are peculiar in every thing; and their gratitude shows that they are heavenly-minded. They therefore thank God not so much for the meat that perisheth, as for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life; not so much for civil freedom, as for the glorious liberty of the sons of God; not so much for health of body as for soul prosperity. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

The blessings here specified are three.

First, their faith in Christ. Faith regards all the Scripture; but this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his son. Faith therefore has principally to do with the Saviour. It receives as true the testimony concerning him; and leads us to depend upon him, and to apply to him for all that he is revealed to accomplish and bestow. Under the influence of it therefore we are represented as looking to him; coming to him; building on him as our foundation; entering him as our refuge; and glorying in him as the Lord our righteousness and strength—For the Scriptures always describe rather than define faith; and show us what it *is* by what it *does*.

Secondly, Their love to all the Saints. I need not observe how often love is connected with faith: but the same order is always maintained between them—Faith precedes love. Love is the fruit and not the root; the effect and not the cause. Faith is the origin of every thing in the Christian life; and it is vain unless it be operative—it works by love. Love to whom? To "The Saints"—not exclusively, but peculiarly. The Thessalonians loved all their fellow-creatures, but not with the same degree or even kind of love. They loved their enemies, but not as they loved their friends. They loved sinners; but it was with a love of pity and benevolence, not of esteem and complacency. But the Saints were regarded by them as the excellent of the earth, and in them was all their delight. Love to whom? To "all the Saints"—regardless of outward distinctions, or the minor matters of religion. Indeed our love to the brethren is not a proof that we have passed from death unto life, unless it regards them as saints. We love them under the influence of some other character or quality, unless we can pray, "Grace be with *all* them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity:" and follow the example of him who said, "*Whosoever* shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother."

Thirdly, Their "hope." Hope is a grace

as well as faith and love; but as a grace hope is in *us;* whereas here hope is said to be "laid up for them in *heaven*"—This shows that the *object* of hope is here intended; or all that which God has promised to his people beyond the grave. The laying it up in heaven reminds us of its security. Hence the admonition of the Saviour: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." In a world like this, where nothing is safe or certain, how anxious, fearful, miserable, must those be, who have their portion in this life! But Christians can dwell at ease. None of these changes and dangers affect their essential welfare. They know in themselves that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. They have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from them.—It shows us that it is principally future. At present they are not at home, but strangers and pilgrims on earth. They have remittances and supplies, but it is from God's riches in glory. The inheritance is reserved in heaven for them; and they cannot possess it till they are of age. Should they think of building their tabernacles here, something would soon tell them to arise and depart hence for this is not their rest. Seed is sown for the righteous; but the reaping-time is to come. Now is the conflict, but the crown of glory that fadeth not away is reserved for the hour of triumph. —Also by being laid up in heaven it is much concealed. O how great is the goodness, says David, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! and says the Apostle, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. After all the developments of the Scripture, and the illuminations of the Holy Spirit in the experience of Christians, we read of a glory that *shall be* revealed. We could not in this weak state of flesh and blood bear the full disclosure. But the veil will soon be drawn aside; and the voice will cry, Come and see. And the sight will infinitely surpass the expectation.

MARCH 31.

"*The engrafted word.*"—James i. 21.

History is silent as to the time when grafting was first introduced. But it has been long practised; and the process is now generally familiar.

The image essentially includes union, vital union between parts not connected before. The man receives the word into his heart, as the tree receives into its stock the scion, which by incorporation becomes thenceforward one with itself. The surprise seems here—We should imagine when the insertion is made, that the sap of the tree entering the scion which is so much smaller, would immediately convert the scion into its own quality: but instead of this the scion converts the sap; and the changed juice maintains, enlarges, fructifies the scion; and causes it in due time to produce—not according to the kind of the old stock—but of the adopted graft.

A metaphor is not to be pressed: but we cannot avoid remarking, That as the body of the tree continues the same after the ingrafting, so in conversion we remain physically the same as before; retaining the same relations, conditions, callings; the same corporeal powers, and mental faculties—only the efficiency of them is changed, hallowed, and applied to other uses and purposes—and all through the medium of the word.

Grafting is one of the most pleasing exercises to those who feel delight in horticulture: and how eagerly and anxiously after the operation has been performed, does the gardener go and examine whether it has succeeded! And this will be soon known. If the scion has *taken*, it proves the vitality by the appearance and growth of the graft. There are first the shoots; then the branches; at length the blossoms and the fruit appear; and the whole increases every year, till it becomes a great tree and abundantly rewards the owner.

Thus earnestly and carefully does a minister look after the effect of his labour; and the success of his preaching is known and hailed in the same way; only with higher exultation and praise. Happy those servants of the Lord Jesus whose hearers have received "the grace of God in truth;" and to whom they say, "our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

It is from hence the gospel has its character; and is called the ingrafted word. It is so called, however, not because this is always the effect—for there are many who receive it in vain; but it is designed to be so received; and it is actually thus received when "it is able to save the soul." Thus it is called the word of faith—not because it is always believed; but because it is credible; and it is made known for the obedience of faith; and it cannot profit us unless faith be mixed with it. Thus it is called the word of life—not because it quickens all those among whom it comes—for there are many who remain dead in trespasses and sins: but it calls us to walk in newness of life; and the man who receives it, not only has "life, but life more abundantly."

How does this apply to us? "My word," said Jesus to the Jews, "has no place in you" —Has it a place in us?—And what place? In the head only? or the heart? Is it in us a notion? or a principle? And does it work powerfully in us as it does in them that believe? And does it fill us with all the fruits of right-

cousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God! Such is the promise: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

APRIL 1.

"*And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*"—John xvii. 13.

"In the world." For as yet he *was* in it, but was just going to leave it and go unto the Father. His last words, considering their conduct, might have been reproachful, or at least reproving: but the things he now spoke were adapted to encourage, and *designed* to comfort them—"These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

Observe the *nature* of this joy—"*my* joy." There is a joy he himself feels in contemplating the welfare of his people. In saving them "he rejoices over them with singing." As the good shepherd he lays the sheep he has found on his shoulder, "rejoicing." He sees of the travail of his soul, and is "satisfied." But his joy here is not the joy of which he is the subject, but the joy of which he is the medium, author, source and only source. Jesus the Saviour! All that is good and blessed is thine. The blood that redeems us is thine. The righteousness which justifies us is thine. The grace that sanctifies us is thine. The power that supports us is thine. It is thy peace that composes us. It is thy joy that must be in us, or we must lie down in sorrow. Thou art "the consolation of Israel;" and there is not a drop of real comfort but flows from thee. But in thee there is every thing that can excite, every thing that can justify joy—even though it should be joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Observe the *means* of this joy—"*These things I speak in the world*, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." This may be extended to all that he had delivered during his whole ministry: but it principally refers to his present speech, and the prayer he had offered in their hearing. These were to animate and console them. In these they could see his heart, his desires, views and purposes on their behalf. Here they heard him say that he had finished the work that was given him to do; and that he had power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. Here they heard him interceding for their preservation, their holiness, their union, their glorification—What could they desire more? And what can we desire more? For having fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, *we* are authorized to receive this strong consolation, and claim an interest in this intercession, according to his own words: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Yea we have the advantage of them since we are more fully acquainted than they were at this time with the dignity of his person, his dearness to God, and the grounds on which he pleads for us, in his obedience unto death, and in his sacrifice on the cross. We know that the Father heareth him always. It was David's privilege to have an advocate at court, and he was the king's own son. But we have a much greater advantage in having an advocate with the Father. What was Jonathan to Jesus? Jonathan too had to plead with a father that hated his friend—But says Jesus, "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."

Let us observe one thing here—The joy of the believer is not a visionary thing. It is not the produce of delusion or ignorance. It flows from conviction; it appeals to the word of the Saviour. They who put their trust in him know his name, and are able to give a reason of the hope that is in them.

Observe the *measure* of this joy—"That they might have my joy *fulfilled in themselves*." They possessed it already but defectively. In conversion a good work is begun; but it is carried on until the day of Christ. The rising sun, the growing corn, and every other image employed in the Scriptures, import the imperfections and progressions there are in the experience of Christians. Hence there are degrees in faith; and we read of weak and of strong faith; of little and of great faith. Some have a competency of faith; others are affluent, they are rich in faith. Some have hope; others the full assurance of hope. Some from various preventions have little of the pleasures of religion; others walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Some have many distressing doubts and fears; others are filled with all joy and peace in believing—And this is peculiarly desirable. For

Observe Lastly, the *importance* of this joy—This undeniably results from the concern our Saviour here expresses. Men often err; and we cannot conclude that a thing is eminently, or even really excellent and valuable because they prize and pursue it: for what trifles, what follies attract and influence many! But as the Lord Jesus thinketh so it is; his judgment is always according to truth—And therefore says he, *These things speak I in the world that my joy might be fulfilled in themselves.* He knew the importance of this possession—to the honour of our religion, and the recommendation of the ways of godliness to others—to our activity and zeal in the divine life—to our weanedness from the world—to our support in trouble—and our

comfort in the valley of the shadow of death. In all these the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Let the Saviour's concern regulate the concern of ministers. Let them be helpers of our joy, and seek the tongue of the learned, that they may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

Let the Saviour's concern regulate the concern of Christians. They should distrust themselves; but they should be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. They should watch and be sober; yet they should be scripturally confident. Are the consolations of God small with them? They are not small in themselves, and they were not small in the experience of the first believers. If therefore they are small with us, is there not a cause? Is there not some secret thing with us? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us resolve to sacrifice whatever has caused him to hide his face from us. Let us pray, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Let us ask and receive that our joy may be full.

APRIL 2.

"*Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.*"—John xii. 27, 28.

Here we see the Saviour's anguish in realizing the approach of the closing scene of his life. Yet the trouble of his soul could not have been produced by the certainty of his suffering and death only; it must have principally regarded the nature of them. Unless we allow this, he loses his pre-eminence. Some of the sages of antiquity met their end with firmness. Socrates and Seneca died with composure. Stephen did not say, "Now is my soul troubled" when they were leading him to be stoned. Paul did not tremble when he said, "I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." We have read of martyrs who issued from their prisons with singing and embraced the stake. And though crucifixion was ignominious and painful, many of the Lord's followers had to bear a death much more torturing and lingering; yet they were not troubled or afraid. But his sufferings and death were to redeem us from the curse of the law; and therefore he was made a curse for us. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And here it is that we see what a dreadful evil sin is. Many deem it a light thing; but hear him saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." See him "sore amazed and very heavy." Behold "his sweat, as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground." A Christian can never deem sin a trifle, or be reconciled to it after he has seen the agonies of him who was pierced by it—And as the citizens of Rome, upon the uncovering of the wounded and gory body of Cæsar, rushed forth to find and avenge his murderers, so every Christian flees to arms at the sight of the death of Jesus.

> "Furnish me, Lord, with heavenly arms,
> From grace's magazine;
> And I'll proclaim eternal war
> With every darling sin."

—He here speaks as one in a strait; as if struggling between inclination and conviction, his feeling and his work—"And what shall I say! Father, save me from this hour: —But for this cause came I unto this hour." There is no real difficulty here. He was human as well as divine; and the Godhead did not absorb the humanity, or change its attributes. The Word was made flesh, and had all the passions and infirmities of our nature, sin only excepted. But suffering in itself can never be agreeable to our nature—for then it would be no longer suffering. If therefore we submit to it, it is not from pleasure, but for some reason or purpose. This reluctance, instead of being inconsistent with submission, serves to enhance it, and is even necessary to it. There is no resignation in giving up what we do not value. If we had no inclination to food, there would be no self-denial in fasting. There is no virtue in a stone; and there is no patience in bearing what we do not feel—Patience is injured by feeling too little, as well as by feeling too much; by despising the chastening of the Lord, as well as by fainting when we are rebuked of him.

Our Saviour therefore acquiesces in the event. But in his mode of expressing it, he leads us to observe two things concerning his death. First, that it was not casual: "For *this cause* came I unto this hour." It was written in the volume of the book—It was a covenant transaction. He assumed a body and entered our world for the very design—"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"—He became incarnate to die. Secondly, it was voluntary—"For this cause *came I unto this hour.*" He was not compelled or deceived into the business; but as it was fore-appointed, so he foreknew and foresaw it; and acted from independence and choice. He loved us and gave himself for us. He had his eye upon this scene from the beginning, and in all his travels of woe held it in view till he reached it, saying, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will: yea, thy law is within my heart."

Hence his pious prayer—"Father, glorify thy name." As if he had said, "If my sufferings will be for thine honour, let them fall upon me, regardless of my feelings." Did he then question this? By no means. His language is rather the expression of confidence. "I know that my death will infallibly and in

finitely advance thy praise; and therefore I cheerfully bow to thy pleasure"—Just as he said, after instituting his own supper, and when about to enter Gethsemane: "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

But what is it to glorify his name! Glory is the display of excellence. God's excellence cannot be increased, but it may be made known; and this is the design of God in all his operations. The heavens declare his glory. All his works praise him. "And every labour of his hands shows something worthy of a God"—

> "But in the grace that rescued man,
> His brightest form of glory shines;
> Here on the cross 'tis fairest drawn,
> In precious blood, and crimson lines."

If God had punished sinners in their own persons according to their desert, his law would have been magnified, and his righteousness and truth confirmed; and *thus* he would have been glorified. And this glory of God is secured *here:* but observe the additional advantage. Had the wicked been punished, though his law would have been magnified, and his truth and righteousness confirmed, we could have seen nothing else—nothing of his mercy and love: but here mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. We see the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us by Christ Jesus. And we draw the consolatory conclusion: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Herein also he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. At present indeed we see comparatively but little of this glory: yet even now the sight is enough to fix and fill the mind of believers. And not only are they relieved and refreshed by the contemplation, but they are sometimes carried away, and catch glimpses of those irradiations reserved for another life, which will draw forth the wonder and praise of the heavenly world for ever—and angels desire to look into these things.

We love not to consider Christ only or chiefly as our model. But after holding him forth in his higher character as our sacrifice, and righteousness, and strength, it is more than allowable to bring him forward as our example. And *then* nothing will be more acceptable to Christians. The love shed abroad in their hearts by his cross, will make them long to resemble him, and pray that they may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. And this conformity is not only desirable but necessary. "If any man," says he, "will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Remember therefore that "he suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should tread in his steps." We may feel our sorrows, and even desire the removal of them; but we must do it as he did. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Like him also we must, as sufferers, regard the honour of God, and be concerned that his Name may be glorified by our trials. "Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires." You cannot do this in the same way with him. His sufferings were mediatorial, atoning, and meritorious. But yours may be instructive, encouraging, and useful. They may recommend your religion, and prove that God never forsakes his people, but is with them in trouble, and comforts them in all their tribulation, enables them to acknowledge "he hath done all things well." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

APRIL 3.

"*They sung an hymn.*"—Matt. xxvi. 30.

This is a circumstance not mentioned by the other evangelists. But it is very instructive.

We should like to have known the very hymn they sung. The psalms the Jews used at the end of the passover began with the one hundred and thirteenth, and ended with the one hundred and eighteenth. Was the hymn here used one of *these?* Or was it any one else of the compositions of David "the sweet psalmist of Israel!" Or was it the words of any other pious poet? We cannot determine. We have every reason to believe the subject of it was suited to the occasion; and never had language been so honoured before. We might also have wished to know the manner in which they performed it—Was it recitative or choral? Symphonious or responsive? But how did *he* join! Oh! to have seen the emotions of *his* countenance, to have heard the strains of *his* voice!—But the Scripture is not designed to indulge our curiosity. It therefore only says, "They sung an hymn." But the fact itself teaches us that singing is a Christian ordinance. It is sanctioned by our Lord's own example. And the authority for the usage was not overlooked by the Apostles; as we see both in their practice and precepts. Thus at Philippi we find Paul and Silas at midnight not only prayed but "sung praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them." And thus Paul says to the Colossians, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." And James enjoins those who are merry to "sing psalms."

But observe by what this singing was immediately *preceded*, and by what it was immediately *followed*.

It was immediately *preceded* by the admin

istration of his own supper Hence we learn that singing should accompany this sacred ordinance. "Joy becomes a feast"—And this is a feast—a feast of love and friendship—a feast of reconciliation between God and us—a feast upon the sacrifice—a feast in which we are reminded that "his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed." And we ought not only to be thankful for such a death, but for such a memento and emblem of it. For here we have signs so lively and sensible that before our eyes he is evidently set forth crucified among us. And what an honour that we who are not worthy of the children's crumbs are allowed to sit down with the King at his table, as a proof that "we are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of faith!"

> "While all our hearts, and all our *songs*,
> Join to admire the feast:—
> Each of us cries with thankful tongues,
> Lord, why was I a guest?"

It was immediately *followed* by his entrance into Gethsemane—When they had sung a hymn "they went out into the mount of olives." Now this garden may be viewed as a place of suffering, and of retirement; and so two things may be observed. First, That the prospect of suffering should not prevent our joy and praise. Though our Saviour had announced the treason of Judas; foresaw the denial of Peter, and the desertion of all the disciples; and knew that he was now going into Gethsemane to agonize there, and there to be apprehended and led away to crucifixion—yet this does not hinder his previously singing a hymn! Does not this say to his followers, Rejoice evermore? In every thing give thanks? A Christian should say with David, "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth. I look for changing scenes and trying dispensations; but I shall always have to sing of mercy as well as judgment—and of mercy in judgment." "Come," would Luther say to Melancthon, a wise man but more timorous than himself, when prospects looked dark and distressing at the beginning of the Reformation: "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm: and let earth and hell do their worst." Should it not reprove and humble us, that we have so little of the mind that was in Christ Jesus, especially when we consider the greatness of his sufferings, and the comparative lightness of our own? If we are not filled with murmurings and complainings, we are often silent in his praise, as if we had nothing to be grateful for, though encompassed with his goodness. The impression of one trial will make us insensible to the claims of a thousand blessings. But Christ might well sing. He knew God would be with him in the trying scene. And will he not be with you? Has he not said, "I will be with thee in trouble?"—And he had a joy set before him at the end of his conflict, the prospect of which might well induce him more than to submit. And have not you? Could you see the issue of all your trials, you also would—you must—rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Secondly, That religious ordinances and engagements should not lead us to dispense with retirement. When therefore they had ended the communion by singing a hymn, they went out into the mount of olives, whither he had often resorted for prayer and meditation. It is alone, after you have left the worship, and especially the table of the Lord, it is *there* that you can revive the remembrance; that you can bring home to yourselves what you have heard and seen; that you can call your consciences to an account; that you can yield yourselves afresh unto the Lord; that you can implore that divine influence which alone giveth the increase.

The neglect of this practice will explain the reason why many who attend the services of the sanctuary derive so little advantage from them—"Through desire a man having separated himself seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom."

APRIL 4.

"*And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*"—Luke xxiii. 26.

In the course of a few hours he had taken many a weary and painful step. From the communion chamber he had walked to the garden of Gethsemane—From Gethsemane he was hurried away, bound as a prisoner, to Annas—From Annas to Caiaphas—From Caiaphas to Herod—From Herod back again to Pilate—so that he had already traversed a great part of Jerusalem. But he must take one melancholy walk more—It is from the judgment-hall to Golgotha.

With us not only hours but days, and frequently even weeks elapse between the sentence of death and the execution: and Tiberias, the present emperor, had issued an order some years before, that no criminal should be executed till ten days after his condemnation. But the benefit of this edict did not extend to murderers and rebels, as it was judged necessary for the public safety and tranquillity, that such malefactors should be immediately put to death. Jesus was arraigned as a mover of sedition as well as a blasphemer; and therefore as soon as ever the sentence was pronounced upon him, he was led away to be crucified. But he was not taken by surprise. He knew that his hour was come and was ready to welcome its approach.

He was not conveyed to the place of execution, but walked. Nor was this all. Among the Romans the criminal carried his

cross. The design of the custom was good. It was to intimate that he was the author of his own punishment; and seemed to say to him, "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself!" The outstretched arms of the criminal were fastened to the transverse beam, while the upright part of the cross rested between his shoulders, and extending down his back dragged on the ground. In this manner was Jesus to go forward. And in his case the imposition was not only humiliating but painful, owing to the bruises and soreness produced by the scourge. Yet thus was he pressed with the heavy load, and had to exert all his strength to draw along the instrument of his death. And considering his agony in the garden, his fatiguing night, his want of sleep and refreshment, and his loss of blood; no wonder he was found unequal to the continuance of the task, at least in the manner his executioners wished. Hence the relief afforded him. This relief was not from tenderness to him, but to hasten the execution. They saw that he grew weak, and frequently paused; and were fearful lest he should fail before he reached the top of the hill. This would have occasioned delay; and their wish was to get the crucifixion over, and the bodies taken down before the Sabbath began. And such was their haste, that by nine o'clock he was lifted up from the earth! He had drawn the burden through the streets, and was now between the city gate and the foot of Calvary, in the ascending of which his difficulty would be increased. Here the procession met Simeon. Simeon was of Cyrene, a city of Libya, a thousand miles distant from Jerusalem. He was an African and a black—never the worse for this—yea we hope it was a token for good with regard to a race chargeable with so guilty a skin. He seems to have been a man of some note: at least he was the father of Rufus and Alexander, who were afterwards distinguished in the church. Simeon was coming up from the country, either to do business or to attend the Passover. Nothing therefore could be more accidental than this meeting—But how much in his history depended upon it! We cannot help thinking he was a secret disciple of Jesus; and seeing him thus suffering, and ready to sink, he betrayed his sympathy and regard by his looks and words. This was enough for the soldiers, and the rude rabble, who setting up a laugh exclaimed, "Well, since the negro pities him, he shall help him." And so "on him they laid the cross, that he should bear it after Jesus." In another place it is said they "compelled" him; but this regards their enforcement of the thing; for it is obvious he made no resistance. Had he been an unrelenting Jew, an enemy to Jesus and his doctrine, he would have railed and cursed; and the Priests and Scribes would have interposed for him, and desired the soldiers not to make a laughing-stock of one of their fellow-citizens. Or if for a moment he discovered a little reluctance, he soon felt enough not only to make him willing to yield, but to enable him to rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for his Name.

And is not the same thing required of us? Has not Jesus said, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple?" We too at first may be ready to shrink back; but further information and experience induce us cheerfully to deny ourselves, and to go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach. We see him before us—dignified and holy—enduring the curse for us—and leaving us only "this light affliction, which is but for a moment, and which worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"—

"We tread the path our Master trod,
We bear the cross he bore;
And every thorn that wounds our feet,
His temples pierced before.

"O patient spotless Lamb!
My heart in patience keep;
To bear the cross so easy made,
By wounding thee so deep."

APRIL 5.

"*And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*"
—Luke xxiii. 27—31.

Only six days before he had descended into Jerusalem from Bethany, by the Mount of Olives, when the multitude spread their garments in the way, and cried, Hosannah! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Many of the same people are now following him as he goes to Calvary to be crucified. As it was now a festival, there was an immense concourse of people; this would readily increase the number of spectators. But a public execution always collects a a crowd. There must be something exceedingly attractive and interesting in such a sight, or so many would not repair to it; for they go voluntarily; and there have been instances in which a reprieve has disappointed their expectation, and led them to murmur that they had taken so much trouble in vain. Yet a public execution might be rendered morally impressive and useful. "The way of transgressors is hard." See there what an evil and bitter thing sin is. See the degradation of our common nature. *That* crim-

mal may be less guilty than myself. He may have had few of my advantages. If left in the same circumstances he was, what might I have been!—

Our regard for the sex makes us lament that so many females always attend such scenes as these. They have certainly more compassionateness than men; but they have also in their nature a principle of curiosity, and a love of excitement, which sometimes carry them away. Here were many women lining the sides of the road by which Jesus was to pass, some leading their children, and some carrying their babes. But they did themselves honour; for while others insulted, they "lamented him." Perhaps some of them had been healed by him. Perhaps some of them had heard him preach. Were any of the mothers here whose infants he had taken in his arms and blessed? Was the widow here whose son he had raised from the dead? Was the woman here who had washed his feet with her tears? *Could* Martha and Mary be here? Or Mary Magdalene and the other Mary?—These seeing him as he came opposite them—in this piteous plight—bleeding—exhausted—pausing and panting—the executioners savagely goading him on—and the populace mocking at his grief; could refrain no longer, but strongly, as the word implies, expressed their sorrow, by cryings, and tears, by wringing of their hands and striking their breasts. This required courage as well as tenderness. It showed an interest in the supposed culprit: it seemed a censure of his suffering as unjust and cruel. And persons were severely forbidden to indulge in public condolence with offenders the Sanhedrim had condemned—But "love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

Our Saviour's kindness and presence of mind are here seen. The nearness of his execution, and his present anguish do not absorb him in selfish feeling, but he *turns* to these daughters of Jerusalem, and says, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." Some suppose that he blamed these tears, because he knew they sprung from ignorance of the cause and design of his death. Others supposed he blamed them because he did not deserve these tears, as he was a guilty sufferer, the Lord having laid upon him the iniquity of us all. The former surmise is ill founded, the latter absurd. The fact is he did not *blame* them at all, but would intimate, That if they knew what was ready to befall them, their sorrow would be more required for themselves than for him. It was an expression of his pity, excited by a view of the dreadful calamities which would desolate their city and their country, when even Jewish mothers, who so valued offspring, would hail the childless; and others envy the happiness of those who would be buried alive! "For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us."

Of these judgments he intimates the cause, in a question drawn from a proverb: "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" The green tree refers to himself, the dry to the people of the Jews. Surely wood full of sap is less inflammable than wood withered and dead. If I suffer who am innocent—how will the guilty escape—and who are adding my death to all their other crimes! It shows us that sin is danger, and prepares us for the wrath of God? "Fury is not in me. Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together." And there are degrees of peril and of punishment. If the ignorant are destroyed for lack of knowledge, what will become of those who possess and abuse it? If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven? If the children of ungodly parents perish, what will be the doom of those who have been trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? If Moses and Aaron were so severely chastised for a single offence to which they were greatly provoked at the waters of strife; what have they to expect who sin constantly and without excuse? If he deals thus with friends, how will he treat enemies? "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, how much more the sinner and the ungodly!" "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

APRIL 6.

"*But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.*"—John xix. 34.

This incident is recorded by none of the other evangelists. But John more than sufficiently attests it. The fact is very striking and improvable; and perhaps we are not instructed in it as we ought to be.

The ancients enlarge much on this wound, and some of the moderns are not far behind them. One makes it an allusion to the manner in which Adam obtained his wife, and by which he was a figure of him that was to come. While the Lord from heaven was sleeping the sleep of death, his side was opened, and from thence his Church was taken, to

whom he has espoused himself. Another makes it the cleft of the rock into which God puts us, as he did Moses, when he passes by and proclaims his goodness. A third represents it as a window made in his body by which we can look into his heart and see his love. Herbert in his Temple calls it a letter-bag into which we may put any of our requests, and which shall be thereby safely conveyed to God.

It is painful to think what freedoms have been taken with the Scriptures; and what silly and profane conceits have been indulged on subjects at once the most sacred and awful. And yet many affect to wonder at the impression made by such improprieties upon the minds of the young, and the educated, and the sceptic, and the scoffer! We are not answerable for the dislike men feel to the truth itself; but we should distinguish between the offence of faith, and the offence of folly.

The occasion of the event was this. The Jews, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath-day, for that Sabbath was an high day, besought Pilate that their legs might be broken; and that they might be taken away. The worst of men are often anxious about the external and ceremonial parts of religion. Conscience as well as decency requires something; and forms and rites are not difficult, and they leave the state of the heart untouched. What a mixture was here! What superstition and wickedness! What regard to the Sabbath and the passover and what swiftness to shed blood! The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Why do they not dispatch the sufferers at once, instead of only hastening their death by addition to their anguish! The violence and the pain probably produced the most dreadful outcries. In this barbarous manner the soldiers came and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. One of these was the penitent thief. He had prayed to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom, and had received the assurance that he should that very day be with him in paradise; and the promise would now be fulfilled. Yet this does not exempt him from the same usage endured by his impenitent companion. All things come alike to all. But though outwardly treated alike, what a difference was there between them in their feelings and in their end—one passing from torture into torment—the other rejoicing that all his suffering was for ever ended, and he should instantly enter into the joy of his Lord!

Jesus had now breathed his last. Was it owing to the greater sensibility of his mind, and delicacy of his body, that he expired sooner than his fellow-sufferers? Rather we see here the voluntariness of his death. He had said, No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself. As he was the sacrifice, so he was the priest, and through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God. He did not die therefore from a mere exhaustion of nature. He cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost: and Pilate, as a thing perfectly unusual, when informed of it, marvelled that he was already dead. When therefore they came to Jesus, and saw that he was already dead, they brake not his legs: but "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water." From hence we see that our Saviour had not been long dead; for had the flesh been cold, and the fluids coagulated, the effusions would not have taken place. Those who understand anatomy, and are aware of the membraneous bag which contains the heart, can easily account for the flowing of water as well as blood.

But we have something of more importance here than any physical reflections. Let me, O my soul, consider the fact as—an instance of the indignity to which the Saviour submitted for my sake—as a confirmation of the reality and certainty of his death—as a symbol of the manner of my recovery by him—and as a display of Providence in fulfilling the Scriptures. Take your own thoughts first upon these remarks, and then read the illustrations in the following exercise.

> "O the sweet wonders of that cross
> Where God my Saviour groan'd and died!
> Her noblest life my spirit draws
> From his dear wounds, and bleeding side."

APRIL 7.

"*One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.*"—John xix. 34.

Let us view this fact as *an instance of the indignity and insult to which the Saviour submitted.* When we consider not only the pre-existence, but the original greatness of the Lord Jesus; and read all the magnificent things the sacred writers have said of him; how surprising do his grace and condescension appear! He took not on him the nature of angels—then they could not have pierced him; but because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself took part of the same. Yet he did not assume our nature in any of its higher forms or conditions. Some are rich; but he had not where to lay his head. Some are admired and caressed; he was despised and rejected of men. Some are nobles and princes; he made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The death was not only a scene of pain, but of shame: and to render it the more ignominious, he was numbered with the transgressors, and crucified between two thieves. He was

also insulted when dying—and mangled when dead. O my soul, was all this humiliation for me? And shall I deem any thing too dear to resign, or too trying to endure for him? How was that precious body prepared for him by the Holy Ghost treated! How was his whole frame agonized when his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! How was his flesh ravaged by the scourge when the ploughers ploughed upon his back, and made long their furrows! How were his temples lacerated with the crown of thorns! How was his face marred when they plucked off the hair! How were his hands and feet pierced with the nails—while the soldier's spear pierced his side! And how shall I regard all this! The wounds of a general who bleeds in the defence of his country are deemed not disgraceful, but scars of honour; and are viewed with emotions of tenderness, admiration, and praise. Jesus displayed much more than such memorials. He retained them after his resurrection. When he appeared to the Apostles, "he showed them his hands and his feet." Thomas was not then present, and continued incredulous, notwithstanding the testimony of ten witnesses —To him he also appeared; and said, "Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing." He wears them now. John saw him as a lamb that had been slain. He will wear them for ever, and the view of them will serve to excite the renewed praises of his people—

Let us view it as *a confirmation of the reality and certainty of his death.* It could not be said he was only in a swoon; or half dead; or that his resurrection was nothing more than a recovery of suspended animation. His enemies were concerned to know that he had expired; and they fully ascertained it. The very act of wantonness in the ruffian soldier demonstrated it. He could not have survived the wound, had it been given him in perfect health. It penetrated the pericardium, and transfixed his vitals. But what is this to us? Every thing. Without his death the whole gospel is a cipher, and all our hopes are a delusion. He died for us. And he died for us not only or principally to confirm his doctrine, or to be our example; but to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; and by the one offering up of himself to perfect for ever them that are sanctified. He made peace by the blood of his cross. He died too as a testator: he made a new will, the legacies of which were invaluable; but it could never have become valid without his death: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." What therefore establishes my faith in his death is beyond expression important. If it be false, I am left to all the effects of the Fall. If it be true, my triumph is complete—It is all my salvation and all my desire.

Let us view it also as a *symbol of the manner of our recovery by him.* Hear what the reporter of the fact has said concerning it in his epistle: "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." It would be far short of the Apostle's meaning to consider the allusion as sacramental, looking only at Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The reference regards the double efficiency of the Lord's death—to satisfy and—to sanctify. Blood to redeem and water to cleanse. The one to remove the curse of sin, the other the love of it. Neither of these blessings is to be found unless in the cross. But they are both to be derived from a dying Jesus: and therefore iniquity need not be our ruin if we apply to him. He is a Prince and a Saviour. He gives repentance and remission of sins.

Let us be convinced of our need of both; and combine both in our creed and our experience. It is a defective view of the death of Christ, to look to it for comfort only: he died not only to atone, but to purify: "he loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might cleanse it by the washing of water by the word." The water and the blood were not severed in their effusion; neither can they be divided in their application. Happy they who value both; and can say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

Lastly, we may view it as *a display of Providence in the fulfilment of the Scripture.* Hence John immediately adds, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Believe what? That Jesus was the Messiah, by the correspondence between him and the prophecies going before. Observe those he mentions: First, says he, "For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." Referring to the language of David, "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." This was not only foretold of him in words; but also prefigured in type. He was our Passover. Now of the Paschal Lamb it was said, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof"—This could not have been verified had the soldier fractured his legs. Nor would another have been accomplished had he not pierced his side. "Again another Scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced:" referring to the language of Zechariah, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Thus the eye of prophecy, ages before the accomplishment, saw this soldier piercing him personally and literally; and the Jews by means of him: and therefore he adds, "and they shall mourn for him." And some of them

after they had crucified him, were brought to repentance, and sorrowed after a godly sort. And others of them, yea all Israel will do this, when the veil is taken from their heart. It is also now realized in every penitent who mourns for his sins as the cause, whoever were the instruments of the sufferings and death of the Saviour.

But how true is it that "the Scripture cannot be broken!" And how wonderfully does God accomplish it—by friends—by foes—by the righteous—by the wicked—by what is casual—by what is criminal—Nothing was further from the thoughts of this unfeeling soldier than the end answered by his brutality—but he was God's instrument, and acted an important and indispensable part in proving his omniscience and veracity.

APRIL 8.

"*They shall look on him whom they pierced.*"
John xix. 37.

It is added in the prophecy from which these words are taken—"And they shall mourn for him." And who is not ready to say, "Nothing could have been more becoming in those who were chargeable with the deed, when they reflected that they had crucified an innocent being, a being who only went about doing good, a being made higher than the heavens—surely they ought to have mourned for him 'as one mourneth for his only son, and to be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.'" But suppose *we* should have been consenting unto his death? Suppose we should have been the cause of it? Suppose his persecutors and murderers were only the instruments we employed? Then our resentment will operate nearer home, and our grief will rend our own souls. And this is the case with a real penitent. By faith he perceives and realizes his own bloodguiltiness in this awful scene; and says,

> "And now the scales have left mine eyes,
> Now I begin to see;
> Oh! the curs'd deeds my sins have done,
> What murderous things they be!
>
> '—'Twere you that pull'd the vengeance down
> Upon his guiltless head;
> Break, break, my heart! oh! burst, mine eyes,
> And let my sorrows bleed"—

And there is no true repentance but what flows from the sight of the cross.

Yet they are not only to look upon him with godly sorrow, but also with enlivening hope. For he was not only pierced by them but for them; and by his stripes they are healed. Strong consolation is necessary to meet true conviction of sin. And here it is to be found, and here only. Every other refuge will be found a refuge of lies; every other comforter a miserable comforter. But that which satisfies the righteousness of God may well satisfy the alarmed and afflicted conscience of the sinner. We have redemption through his blood; and this blood cleanseth us from all sin. We oppose to the number and heinousness of our offences the infinite value of the sacrifice. We are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son. This death we plead, and are accepted in the Beloved; and we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

We look on him also, and derive submission from the sight. The Apostle tells us to "consider him" as a sufferer, lest we "be weary and faint in our minds." His cross is the tree by which the bitter waters in the wilderness are healed. His death has redeemed us from the curse of the law; and nothing penal is left in any of our trials. The most painful of them are only the medicines of our heavenly Physician: the corrections of a loving Father. They are blessings in disguise. Are we tempted to despond or complain at our afflictions? What are our endurings compared with his?—

We look on him also to excite and inflame our zeal. Many motives to obedience are mentioned in the Scriptures, and therefore it cannot be improper to be influenced by them. Yet the purest and the most powerful motive is drawn from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the first Christians owned and felt it. The love of Christ, says Paul, constraineth us to live not to ourselves but to him that died for us and rose again. The divinity is equal to the poetry when the bard of night sings—

> "—O bleeding Calvary,
> The true morality is love of thee."

Hear Hervey—In a letter dated Weston-Favell, May 6th, 1748, he writes thus to a person he had befriended. "With regard to the little assistance which I have contributed, and which Mrs. —— thinks worthy of her acknowledgments; I beg of her to observe that it is owing, wholly owing to her adored Redeemer. To him, to him alone, she is obliged—if there be an obligation in the case, for this friendly donation. He has been pleased to command this instance of my gratitude for his unspeakably tender mercies to my soul. He has been pleased to declare that he will look upon such a piece of kindness as done to his own blessed self. This makes me, this makes all believers glad to embrace every such occasion of showing our thankfulness to our infinitely condescending gracious Lord. The action which Mrs. —— calls generous does not arise, as she expresses it, from any innate nobleness of mind. I remember the time when this heart was as hard as the flint, and these hands tenacious even to avarice. But it is Jesus, the quickening Spirit, and the lover of souls, who has made

your friend to differ from his natural self. If the flinty heart is melted into compassion, it is melted by a believing consideration of his most precious blood. If the avaricious hands are opened and made ready to distribute, willing to communicate, they are made so by the free grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore not unto me, but unto the great and good Redeemer, are all the returns of gratitude due."

APRIL 9.

Joseph of Arimathea, (being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews,) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus."—John xix. 38.

We may consider this man in connexion with prophecy. Though all the prophets gave him witness, no one so specially testified of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, as Isaiah. Observe the whole of the fifty-third chapter—But it is the ninth verse that bears upon our subject. Bishop Lowth's rendering has been universally deemed an improvement—"And his grave was appointed with the wicked, but with the rich man was his tomb." Here it is clearly intimated that there would be an instance of overruling providence. Had the common and natural course of things taken place, he would have been buried with other malefactors in Golgotha, the place of a skull. *There* were thrown the bodies of the two thieves—but had his been thrown there, the prediction could not have been verified. But the word was gone out of God's mouth, and was firmer than heaven and earth. And if we turn from the prophecy to the history, we shall see how, though his grave was likely to have been with the wicked, yet with the rich man *was* his tomb. "When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed." Let this induce and enable us to confide in the word of God more fully and more firmly. It is a tried word. For near six thousand years it has been continually put to the test; and it has always been found faithful—"The Scripture cannot be broken."

We may consider Joseph of Arimathea in reference to his rank in life. He was "a rich man." How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! Yet we here see the camel drawn through the eye of the needle: for what is impossible with men is possible with God. He was "an honourable counsellor." Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. Have any of the rulers believed on him? Suppose they have not! Is all goodness or sense confined to them! The common people gave much better proof even of their wisdom and taste than those who despised them; "the common people heard him gladly"—But we answer, yes; some of the rulers have believed on him: witness Joseph of Arimathea; and Nicodemus. The wife of Herod's steward followed Jesus; we read in the Acts, of honourable women not a few; and in the Epistles of saints in Cæsar's household. We find Abraham rich and powerful enough to furnish from his own family four hundred armed men. Godliness once rode in the second chariot of Egypt: and led Daniel, the prime minister of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to retire three times a day for praise and prayer: and in all ages there have been some instances of piety in the higher walks of like. There have indeed been few enough to show that the cause of Christ has not depended on them, while they have been numerous enough to confute the prejudice that religion is only suited to the ignorant and vulgar.

We may also view this man in connexion with his infirmity and imperfection. The Jews had passed a decree that if any man confessed Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Hence many who believed on him, yet feared to confess him. This was for some time the case with Joseph. He was "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews." "The fear of man bringeth a snare." It is this that leads many to ask, not whether such a thing be right; but what will people think and say of me if I adopt it? It is this that keeps many from following their convictions, and acknowledging what they *know* to be the truth. But we ought faithfully to adhere to the dictates of conscience; and not only *be* Christians, but appear such, confessing with the mouth, as well as believing with the heart; and remembering that if we are ashamed of Christ, he will be also ashamed of us. We do not therefore justify Joseph in this part of his conduct. Yet let us remember—That some individuals, owing to their stations and connexions, have difficulties in religion to contend with which others know nothing of, or they would feel and pray for those they are now perhaps only disposed to censure and condemn—That grace operates in various degrees—and that between the beginning and the progress of its work in the soul there may be as great a difference as between the mustard seed and the mustard tree. And —That we may hope the Lord has more disciples than we are aware of, only they are kept back from our observation by things blamable in themselves, yet compatible with sincerity. Little did Elijah think when he said I am left alone that there were seven

thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Little did the Apostles imagine their Lord had a secret yet real disciple in Joseph of Arimathea.

Therefore again observe this man in the increase and development of his Christian principle. For he now shows himself openly, and acts a noble and distinguished part. The effect was owing to the death of Jesus—This did more than his miracles and preaching—This does every thing to purpose in the divine life—Hence our strength as well as comfort—"I, if I be lifted up from the cross, will draw all men unto me."—Prudence would have said, Forbear. You will involve yourself in trouble and expence. You will draw upon yourself suspicion. You will excite prejudice. You will injure your usefulness—Besides he is now dead, and what good can you do his remains? But Joseph confers not with flesh and blood. It required no little zeal and courage to own a regard for one that had been judicially executed under the charge of blasphemy and sedition—to come forward and publicly ask for his body—to give it an honourable interment in his own garden and his own tomb, which had never yet been used. This was more than identifying himself with the malefactor; it was doing him honour to the utmost. It was far surpassing his Apostles: they had all forsaken him, and disowned their master dying and dead. But this man goes forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach and braving every danger; for he now feels that perfect love that casteth out fear.

Let us not decide upon the character of persons too soon. Let us not give them up because of some present weaknesses, much influenced perhaps by peculiar circumstances. Let us not despise the day of small things. We have often seen, in the experience of the bruised reed and the smoking flax, judgment brought forth to victory: and we are confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. How delightful to see persons proving better than our fears, and far surpassing all our hopes! What changes in our views and feelings sometimes render us a wonder to others, and perhaps also to ourselves! How unlike may the present be to the future! In the days of Queen Mary, when so many were put to death for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation—that Moloch at whose shrine so many victims have been immolated, a poor man was convicted and sentenced to be burnt alive. In his way to the place of execution he was very pensive and depressed. But when he came in sight of the stake, overpowered for the time with fear, he involuntarily exclaimed, "Oh! I cannot burn! I cannot burn!" Some of the priests, supposing he wished to recant, immediately approached and addressed him. This however was not his design; but he wanted more of that confidence and consolation which would enable him to endure becomingly the fiery trial. He was left some minutes to himself, during which in great earnestness and agony of spirit, he prayed that God would manifest himself more clearly to his mind—When God so shone in upon his soul, that raising and clapping his hands, he cried with a loud voice—"*Now* I can burn—*Now* I can burn."

APRIL 10.

"*Because I live, ye shall live also.*"—John xiv. 19.

We are seldom sufficiently struck with individual importance. We are all in a state of connexion with, and dependence upon each other, like the members of the human frame, in which one part cannot say to another, I have no need of thee; and where even those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary to the welfare of the whole body. But there are persons who seem to be the very life of the cause or the community to which they belong. Place them in a state of danger and you awaken a thousand sympathies and anxieties. Remove that monarch, and the extensive empire founded by his valour and skill is crushed at once, or crumbled by degrees to nothing. Remove that minister, and the congregation he has by his talents attracted and formed, is divided, diminished and dispersed. Remove the head of that family, and two tender relations are immediately produced, the widow and the fatherless, and both reduced to perplexity and distress; it may be to want and oppression. Yet in all these instances the dependence is not absolute, and the consequences admit of much exception and limitation. Empires have flourished when monarchs have fallen. Congregations have continued when ministers have finished their course. Families have been provided for when the husband and the father have been taken away—But here is a Being upon whom hangs all the glory of his Father's house. He is indispensably and infinitely necessary to a multitude which no man can number. Is *he* alive or dead? If he be dead we are for ever undone. If he be alive we are safe, we are happy, we are made for eternity! And what is his own language? "Because I live, ye shall live also."

By his life here, though spoken of as present, because of its nearness and certainty, he means his life after his resurrection; and to this the Apostle refers when he says, "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Of this life we think comparatively too little, not considering—that it was expedient for *us* that he went away—that he not only

died *for* us but rose again—that he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour—that he is carrying on in heaven the same cause that brought him down to earth. There will be indeed a close to this at the end of the economy, when he will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all: but at present he is leading not only a life of glory but of office, and will continue applying on the throne, the redemption he procured on the cross, till he shall appear the second time without sin unto the complete salvation of his people. It would be easy to show how the life of his people in their justification, sanctification, and glorification depends on the living Saviour; but we see also that their life is insured and secured by his—"*Because* I live, *ye* shall live *also*."

The certainty of the result is founded in three principles. First, the union subsisting between him and them. Secondly, the claim he has to urge on their behalf, having suffered and died for them. And Thirdly, the all-sufficiency he possesses to meet all their exigences. We cannot infer the safety and welfare of a person merely from the regard of his friend; for however intensely his friend may love him, he may be unable to succour and defend him. But the ability of the Saviour is equal to his readiness to help us. His love passeth knowledge, and has the command of unbounded resources—he is mighty to save—able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him. Jacob supposed Joseph was dead, but he was alive, and the prime minister of Egypt, and all the stores of the realm were at his disposal; and because he lived his family lived also. And we have an intercessor for us, an advocate with the Father, a relation who loved us so as to bleed and die for us, who has power over all flesh, who has all power in heaven and in earth, and is head over all things unto the Church, which is his body. How can we perish for want while in him all fullness dwells? In what perils can his defence fail us? "Fear not," says he, "I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

"How can I die while Jesus lives,
Who rose and left the dead?
Pardon and grace my soul receives
From mine exalted Head."

APRIL 11.

"*God maketh my heart soft*."—Job xxiii. 16.

We may consider God's softening the heart three ways. There is a soft heart derived from constitution—Thus he makes the heart soft as the God of nature. There is a soft heart derived from affliction—Thus he makes the heart soft as the God of Providence. There is a soft heart derived from renovation—Thus he makes the heart soft as the God of grace.

Let us now attend to the first of these. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and while there is a general sameness, there is also a remarkable variety in the human race naturally. It seems strange that any should deny this, and endeavour to account for every variation and inequality from the operation of causes subsequently to birth. Events and circumstances have unquestionably a mighty influence in forming the character; and in elevating or depressing, in rousing or checking the powers of the individual: but surely there is some difference previously to the existence or want of excitement and development. We cannot suppose that any similar mode of training would have made Johnson Shakspeare, or Shakspeare Johnson. Some are naturally bold, forward, and loquacious. Others are timid, retreating, and slow of speech. The meal out of which some are kneaded seems leavened with laudanum; while mercury seems infused into the very frame of others, and they are all vigour and motion. How unimpressible are some! It matters not where they are, all places and all scenes are nearly the same to them; they are insensible to every thing that can strike the senses, imagination, and passions. But—and you may see it in children—take others and you find their curiosity is awakened, their fear excited, their hope inflamed, according to the quality of what comes in contact with them; and their feelings respond to every pleasing or painful occurrence.

We are not able to determine physically the cause of this constitutional sensibility; it requires far more knowledge than we possess or can probably acquire. Neither is it necessary to attempt absolutely to decide whether this softness of heart be upon the whole desirable or advantageous. We must not in this case arraign the sovereign pleasure of God, any more than in our form or our stature, by saying, Why hast thou made me thus? Nor should we forget that religion adapts itself to every peculiarity of natural formation and complexion. It has scenery for the imaginative, secrets for the inquisitive, depths for the profound, argument for the reasoning, and facts for the busy and simple; it has active engagements for the daring and zealous; and retirement and gentleness for the meek; it allures some, and some it saves with fear. There is nothing also in the world purely natural, but the Maker of all things has, so to speak, balanced or qualified; levying some tax upon what is admired and envied, and connecting some redeeming quality, or some power of compensation with every disadvantage. Certain states or qualities therefore abstractedly considered cannot prove how much the subjects of them actually suffer or enjoy.

The tenderness of which we are speaking certainly gives a quickness to the sensations of the individual, so that he admits more misery than another; but he feels also more happiness. Such a man incurs indeed many a pang by his sensibility, but then he is capable of a thousand pleasures which others know not of. He has indeed less peace, but more enjoyment; and his exquisite indulgences, with the alternations of sadness—in which too *he* often feels a strange kind of satisfaction and luxury, are far better than the stagnant pool, or the dull unvarying level of dullness and unfeeling sameness. I would rather be a sensitive plant than a fungus. Who would as a traveller, be cased from head to foot in leather, to escape the inconvenience of a few gnats and briers, and lose the liberty and gratifications of the journey?

All must allow that this sensibility renders the possessor amiable. Men are commonly ashamed of being seen in tears. But true greatness is always tender and sympathetic. Homer, that just observer of nature, makes no scruple to represent Ulysses—his best of men; and Achilles—his bravest of men, frequently weeping. Jonathan and David were the most heroical young men of the age; yet they wept on each other's neck, till each exceeded. Yea we read that the Lord of all wept at the grave of Lazarus. What can equal beauty in tears? The moment a female appears devoid of tenderness, she wants an excellence so essential that nothing can atone for in her; and though she may possess talent, and retain the dress of the sex, she forfeits the honourable and endeared name of woman.

It will also be acknowledged that this sensibility prepares persons for usefulness. In numberless cases where the relief and comfort of our fellow-creatures are concerned, many are not excited and constrained to act, because they do not feel.

APRIL 12.

"*God maketh my heart soft.*"—Job xxiii. 16.

THERE is a soft heart derived from affliction—Thus God maketh the heart soft as the God of Providence.

To this Job immediately refers. "For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me, because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face."

Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. But we shall not enlarge upon the multitude and variety; the sources, kinds, and degrees of human sufferings in this vale of tears. And we shall turn away as soon as possible from those who seem insensible under their trials, and despise the chastening of the Lord. When God strikes them, they strike again; and repair in their calamity to places of sin or dissipation, to drown all sense of sorrow. Of this temper were those of whom Jeremiah complained: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." The judgments of God which befall some men are like blows inflicted upon wild beasts, which instead of taming, enrage them the more. Isaiah describes some incorrigible rebels as saying, in their pride and stoutness of heart, "the bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." And we read that Hiel, the daring rebuilder of Jericho, not only disregarded the threatening of Joshua, but even when one half of it was fulfilled, he went on still in his trespasses, and having "laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub." Thus many if not verbally yet practically express a determination to proceed in an evil course, notwithstanding obvious and repeated discouragements and checks thrown in their way. Ahab was reduced very low, "yet in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." And God brands him with infamy, that all future ages may know that this was the desperate wretch who, when the Edomites, and the Philistines, and the Assyrians were upon him, even then he provoked a greater adversary than all, and would fight against God—"This is that king Ahab." And is even this a peculiar case? Can nothing of this kind deservedly stigmatize you?—"This is the man who when desolated in his circumstances, bereaved of his connexions, and more than once the subject of disease, instead of humbling himself under the mighty hand of God, waxed worse and worse, and proceeded from evil to evil."

But in a general way, when people come into trouble, they feel, feel seriously and softened. But what is the result? It is threefold. First—It often wears off, and the effect produced is like the morning cloud and early dew that passeth away. Oh what a difference has there frequently been between the same persons in sickness and health! They "howled upon their beds." "They poured out a prayer when his chastening hand was upon them." O "let my soul live and it shall praise thee." And "spare me a little longer." "I will not offend any more." And they added to their prayer confessions, resolves, and vows. But no sooner were they raised up and set free, than they returned again to folly and endeavoured to drive from their minds the remembrance of what could only charge them with inconsistency, and clothe them with

shame. Pharaoh after every plague cried, I have sinned; entreat the Lord for me; but when there was respite he hardened his heart.

Secondly—As this softening is frequently transient, so it is sometimes fatal. It seems indeed wonderful that those who know nothing of the grace of God, should often bear their troubles as they do; and that they are not always driven by the heavy pressure of anguish to distraction or despair. And so it is with not a few. They droop and sink in the day of adversity; and are swallowed up of overmuch sorrow. They verify the words of the Apostle; "The sorrow of the world worketh death"—It deprives them of reputation, subjects them to contempt, deprives them of support, preys upon their health, breaks down their spirits: and the sufferer gradually drops into the grave, or by self-destruction is hurried from the evils of time into those of eternity—for whatever he endured here was only the beginning of sorrows. Oh how desirable is it when the heart is wounded to apply to it the balm of Gilead; and when it is softened to give it the impression of heaven! And

Thirdly—This is sometimes the case, and the heart by suffering is softened to purpose, and the man can say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." As therefore when I see the smith putting a bar of iron into the fire, I conclude he is going to work upon it, and form it for some useful purpose, which could not be done while it was cold and hard; so I always look prayerfully and hopefully towards a man when the Lord brings him into trouble. Manasseh in his distress sought the God of his father, and found him. The famine made the Prodigal think of home and he was starved back into a return. The Grecian said, I should have been lost had I not been lost. And there are those now living who can say, I should have been poor had I not been impoverished. The darkening of my earthly prospects made me long after a better country, that is an heavenly. Ah! happy unkindnesses and treacheries, that said, "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide"—it was you that induced me to say, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me." Ah! vain world—

"Your streams were floating me along,
Down to the gulf of black despair;
And while I listen'd to your song,
Your streams had e'en convey'd me there.

"Lord, I adore thy matchless grace,
That warn'd me of that dark abyss;
That drew me from these treacherous seas,
And bid me seek superior bliss.

"Now, from the shining realms above,
I stretch my hands, and glance mine eyes;
O for the pinions of a dove,
To bear me to the upper skies.

'There from the bosom of my God,
Oceans of endless pleasures roll—
There would I fix my *last* abode.
And drown the sorrows of my soul."

APRIL 13.

"*The Lord maketh my heart soft.*"
Job xxiii. 16.

THERE is a soft heart derived from renovation. Thus he makes the heart soft as the God of grace.

Of this the Lord speaks in the new covenant. "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." There cannot be a greater contrast than between these substances as to feeling—but the heart before conversion is stone. And after conversion flesh. Sin hardens the heart; and whatever tenderness there may be in it with regard to other things, it has none towards the things of the Spirit, till the renewing of the Holy Ghost. But when grace makes the heart soft it will appear in the following effects.

It will melt with sorrow for sin. Many are afraid of hell; but they are not affected with the sin that leads to it. Sin is the last thing some people think of; but it is the first thing with the penitent—"My sin is ever before me." And this is the case even in affliction; even then sin oppresses more than trouble. This is the burden too heavy for him to bear. After the loss of an only son, a good woman once said, "Under this loss I have shed many tears for my son, but many more for my sin." Thus Ephraim was heard bemoaning himself, and what was the subject of his complaint? Not his suffering—but his incorrigibleness under it: "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke—I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth—Turn thou me and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." And what is the divine promise? "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." And repentance never flows so freely, and we never so much sorrow after a godly sort as when we are led to the cross and view the Saviour dying not only by us but for us.

When the heart is made soft it will be pliant to the word of truth. An instance of this is mentioned in the experience of Josiah. "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord." It is the general character of the subjects of divine grace that they "tremble at his word." The

sinner sits before among the threatenings of God, as Solomon sat between his twelve lions unalarmed because they were dead. But faith enlivens them and makes them roar; and he now cries, "What must I do to be saved?" Yet we are not to imagine that he feels the divine menaces only; the promises so exceeding great and precious equally awaken his apprehensions. Oh! says he, if I miss them, and come short at last! How many feelings will the reading of one chapter, or the hearing of one sermon excite in the soul of such a man! The Bible is his only rule, and his only judge. He dares not trifle with its contents; nor question its declarations. He yields himself to its authority without asking how can these things be; and receives with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save the soul.

If the heart be made soft we shall be compassionate towards others. Are our fellow-creatures in penury? We shall have bowels and mercies; and not say, Go in peace; be ye warmed, and be ye filled, while we give them not such things as are needful for the body. Are their souls desolate within them? We shall weep with them that weep. Are they in ignorance? In meekness we shall instruct them. Have they fallen? In meekness we shall endeavor to restore them; hating the sin, but pitying the sinner. Have they offended and injured us? We shall not be revengeful or implacable; but tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.

Such a heart is also very sensible of the divine goodness. The man instead of complaining of what he wants, wonders at what he possesses and enjoys. He feels that he is unworthy of the least of all his mercies. What claims have I upon him? I was a poor blind creature, but he has opened mine eyes. I was naked, and he clothed me. I was a child of wrath, and he has made me an heir of glory. What shall I render? Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

A man whose heart God has made tender will be alive to his glory. He will mourn to hear his name blasphemed, and to see his gospel despised. He will be sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it will be his burden. He will be holily fearful lest he should grieve his Holy Spirit, or cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. His glory will touch every spring of action in his soul; and he will be daily asking the Lord what wilt thou have me to do?

O what a blessing is such a heart as this! It is better than thousands of gold and silver. It prepares for all the manifestations of divine love; and it insures them.

Who feels a hard heart? The very feeling shows some sensibility. Who longs for a soft one? Let him ask of God, who is more ready to hear than we are to pray, and who "despiseth not the prayer of the destitute."

APRIL 14.

"*The God of all comfort.*"—2 Cor. i. 3.

How much, both as to duty and privilege, depends upon the views we entertain of "Him with whom we have to do!" And while born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and passing through a vale of tears, and feeling even in our best estate some heart's bitterness—for "full bliss is bliss divine;" what can be more encouraging and delightful than to regard him as "THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT?"

And how well does he deserve this beneficent title! Every comfort we have in the creature is from him. If sleep comforts us when we are weary, or food comforts us when we are hungry, it is from his goodness. If when he sendeth abroad his ice like morsels and none can stand before his cold, we have houses to defend us, raiment to cover us, fuel to warm us, it is from him. When the spring returns, Whose sun calls us to go forth into the fields and garden? Who regales all our senses? Who charms the ear with these melodies? the eye with these colours? the smell with these perfumes? and the appetite with these tastes? Who gives us those benign and joyous and grateful sensations which we feel when the lambs sport themselves? and the apple-tree is dressed among the trees of the wood? and the hay appeareth? and the full corn waves in the ear? and the reaper fills his hand, and he that bindeth sheaves his bosom? and the little hills rejoice on every side? and the year is crowned with his goodness?

Who has not by accident or disease been confined to the chamber of weariness and pain; and who by the sympathies, attentions, and soothings of the tenderest friendship has comforted you upon the bed of languishing, and made all your bed in your sickness! And who when the graves were ready for you, and you said, I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world, Who comforted you by the return of ease, the re-glowing of health, the renewal of your strength, the resumption of your liberty—so that all your bones said, "Who is a God like unto Thee?"

Has a friend like ointment and perfume rejoiced your heart by the sweetness of his counsel? or has a minister been the helper of your faith and joy? The Lord gave him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. God comforted you by the coming of Titus.

The heathens made idols of every thing that afforded them relief and comfort; and thus they loved and served the creature more

than the Creator. Let us not resemble them; but remember that whatever may be the medium of our comfort, God is the only source of it. Thus the instrument instead of seducing us from God, will be a conductor to him; and the stream will lead us "to the fountain of life." God will not give his glory to another; and we cannot affront him more than by substituting any thing in the place of him. This will provoke him to strike the idol that robs him of his praise out of the way; or cause him by disappointing us in the moment of application to say, "Am I in God's stead! If the Lord help thee not, whence should I help thee?" If we will not make him our trust, he will make that whereon we lean to smite us. He can take comfort out of all our possessions and enjoyments, so that in the midst of our sufficiency we shall be in straits, and with cheerfulness on every side walk in silence and sadness, like a ghost among the tombs. What Job calls his friends, "physicians of no value," "miserable comforters," will apply to all our dependences and expectations separate from God. Even in laughter the heart will be sorrowful. Our successes, like the quails of the Jews, will poison us while they gratify: our prosperity will destroy us: and at the end of our days the fool and the wretch will acknowledge the truth of Jonah's confession, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies; salvation is of the Lord."

True comfort is to be found in God only; in the hope of his mercy; in the evidence of his friendship; in the freedom of his service; in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But they who seek it in him shall not be confounded. He has insured to those who flee for refuge to this hope strong consolation, by a promise confirmed by an oath; and what he promises he is able to perform. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. No depth of distress is below his reach. He can create comfort when there is nothing to derive it from. He can extract it out of the most unlikely materials. He can bring order out of confusion, strength out of weakness, light out of darkness.

Sufferer! think of *Him!* It is his prerogative and delight to "comfort them that are cast down." Why should you faint or despond? Are the consolations of God small with thee? Does not *He* say "*I*, even *I*, am he that comforteth thee?"

Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief. "Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side."

APRIL 15.

"*Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me.*"—Psalm li. 11.

We may see what David prized by what he deprecates. There were many calamities at the thought of which his heart might have trembled. He could remember how God for his disobedience had punished his predecessor Saul, and had rent the kingdom from him. He knew how God by Nathan had threatened himself; and he could not help feeling the announcement, that the child should die and the sword never depart from his house. Yet he does not say, O let me escape the rod—do not deprive me of my throne—or involve my family in trouble and disgrace. This is what many would have implored. But David prays, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and thus it is with men of the world; they are satisfied as long as their friends and health, their corn and wine abound. Tell them of the hiding of God's countenance, and the loss of the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and they know not your meaning, and are ready to treat you with scorn or pity. They judge of every thing by a fallacious standard. "Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things." *They* weigh every claim in the balance of the sanctuary. They walk by faith and not by sight. No evils therefore appear to them like those which regard the welfare of the soul and eternity.

And their judgment is founded in truth. The most awful evils are spiritual evils. And these are more peculiar to the dispensation under which we live. Temporal judgments were common under the law, when offenders were often punished immediately, sensibly, visibly. We see this in the case of Lot's wife, Miriam, Uzzah and many others recorded in the Old Testament. But under the gospel, inflictions are more spiritual. Here men are given up to a hard heart, a reprobate mind, a seared conscience; to vile affections; to strong delusion; to believe a lie. The spirit of slumber falls upon them. The word and ordinances of religion become barren and unprofitable. By the fascinations of error they are so bewitched that they cannot obey the truth. Yet they are easy. For these are judgments that do not alarm; it is the very nature of them to stupify. Oh! it would be a thousand times better to lose all your substance and beg your bread from door to door; a thousand times better to be robbed of health, and never enjoy another hour of ease, than for God thus to punish you. And though you will not and ought not to pray for sufferings absolutely, if you are like-minded with David you will be willing that God should deal with you in any way rather than say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone"—And this will be your most earnest prayer: "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me."

But was David in danger of this? We do

not like to get rid of an apparent difficulty by denying a revealed truth. And such appears to us the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. We are therefore confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Yet first, the effect deprecated may take place in a measure and degree. God was provoked to leave Hezekiah in the business of the ambassadors of Babylon, and it showed what was in his heart. And God may be so grieved as to suspend the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and all joy and peace in believing. And secondly, by yielding to temptation a partaker of divine grace may be reduced to such a state of darkness and horror and anguish, as to apprehend God's entire abandonment of him for ever. This was David's case. His fall had broken his bones, closed his lips, deprived him of the joy of God's salvation, and made him fear that he was cut off from before his eyes.

Such an evil and bitter thing is it to sin against God. So surely will our backslidings reprove us. If his children walk not in my judgments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. The way to walk comfortably is to walk consistently. I am always sorry to see some professors so calm and happy as they are. With their levity of temper, and vain conversation, and worldly conformities, and neglect of the means of grace—were they the Lord's people, surely he would show that they are not walking so as to please him. Them that honour me, I will honour. Blessed is the man that feareth always.

APRIL 16.

"*Ye were as sheep going astray.*"—1 Peter ii. 25.

The words seem to be, if not a quotation from, yet an allusion to the language of Isaiah —"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." If there be truth in this supposition, two things are asserted by the prophet which are not repeated by the Apostle. The one is, the *universality* of the charge—*All* we like sheep have gone astray. There is no difference between Jew and Greek. The Scripture has proved all under sin. The other is, the *diversification* of the depravity—We have turned every one to his *own* way. Though all are guilty, each has some particular iniquity to which he is attached, by his constitutional complexion or his outward circumstances. And here it is that many are deluded. They flatter themselves by comparison, and are satisfied because they are free from some crimes chargeable upon others; not considering that they also are wanderers, only in another road. A straight line is always the same; but there are millions of crooked ones. There was only one ark by which any could be saved; but there were numberless abysses in which they could be drowned. Nothing, says a good writer, is more lamentable, than to hear people who are all wrong disputing among themselves which is right. Yet this is common. But the lover of pleasure and the lover of gold; the profligate and the pharisaical; the open offender and the close hypocrite; the superstitious Papist and the formal Protestant, are all in the same condition with regard to their safety. Let us remember that the Scripture is our only rule of judgment, and that it matters not what we think of ourselves, or others think of us—if we are destitute of faith in Christ and true holiness. "He that believeth not the Son hath not life:" and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The words are a metaphor; a metaphor often used by the sacred writers, and therefore just and pertinent. Indeed nothing can be more significant of the danger and misery of a sinner than a strayed sheep. The welfare of the sheep depends on the care of the shepherd. If they wander beyond his protecting arm, they are liable to be destroyed by beasts of prey; or if they leave his pasturage they are likely to perish for want of food: for though they can go astray of themselves, they cannot defend themselves, nor provide for themselves, nor of themselves find their way back. They are therefore lost unless sought after. The metaphors of the Scripture, however, though strong in their allusion, are often only partial. But they are more forcible by being limited; for by stretching a comparison to reach every thing, we weaken it as well as render it ridiculous. Sheep in going astray are not guilty, but they would be criminal and deserving all they suffered, if they were possessed of reason, and after having been under the superintendence of the kindest shepherd, and allowed to want no good thing, they should knowingly abandon him, and wilfully incur every kind of peril and wretchedness. And is not this the emblem of our conduct? Did not God make man upright? Did not the inspiration of the Almighty give him understanding? Was he not placed in a condition of safety, peace, and happiness? Was he not fenced in by divine commands? Apprized of the consequences of going astray? And warned against them?—Yet astray he went!

And thus we reach the fact which the words were intended to express—the natural state of men as alienated from the life of God —They are as sheep going astray. They go astray from their duty *to* God. Thus they forsake him as their Lord and owner. As he made them, and gave them all their powers, possessions, and enjoyments, they are bound to serve and obey him: but they prefer their

own will to his authority, and live in the violation of his laws which are all holy and just and good. They go astray from their happiness *in* God. Thus they forsake him as their portion, following after rest and satisfaction apart from the supreme good. All wish for happiness; but where do they naturally seek it! In the pleasures of sin, in the dissipations of the world, in science, fame, riches, power, friendship. They do not seek it in the favour, the image, the presence, the service of God. They wish to be happy without God. They ask "Who will show us any good?" but do not pray, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us"—If ever they go to God, it is when fear or affliction urges them. Do they delight themselves in the Almighty? Do they always call upon God? They go astray from their recovery *by* God. Thus they forsake him as their Saviour; who instead of abandoning them when they departed from him, remembered them in their low estate, and provided means the most suitable and adequate for their restoration. He spared not his own Son, but gave him up as a propitiation for their sins. He sends them the gospel; beseeches them by his ministers; and urges the message by a thousand motives—But they make light of it: they turn away from him that speaketh, and neglect so great salvation. Yea they oppose it; and if ever they think of returning to God, it is by a way of their own devising in preference to his. They go about to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness which is of God; and act in their own strength instead of being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; thus frustrating him in his greatest delight, and robbing him of his highest glory.

Reflect upon each of these: and remember, Christian, this was once your own state. Look back; and acknowledge that ye yourselves also were once foolish and disobedient. But *after* this the loving kindness of God our Saviour towards you appeared. If you are justified you were once condemned: if alive you were once dead: if found you were once lost. How happy that you can be addressed as those who were once going astray, but are *now* returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls!

APRIL 17.

"*He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified.*" Heb. ii. 11.

The Apostle here speaks of Christ and of Christians as concerned in the same work, but differently concerned. He is the agent, they are the subjects—He sanctifieth, and they are sanctified. We are not however to suppose that in this work they are passive; or that he acts upon them as a mechanic operates upon stone and wood which are insensible and unconscious of the process. He does not sanctify them without their knowledge, and consent, and choice, and exertion. According to his good pleasure he works in them to *will* and to *do*. He makes them the instruments as well as the subjects; and so engages them, that the work is represented as their work as well as his. Hence it is enjoined, as well as promised, and we are called upon to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; and are assured that he who has the hope of Christ in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.

But there is no inconsistency here. We believe, but he enables us to believe. We exercise repentance, but he gives us repentance unto life. We bear the fruit, but it is the fruit of the Spirit, and in him is all our fruit found—and therefore we are called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that *he* may be glorified.

To sanctify admits of two imports. The first is separation or setting apart from common to sacred use. Thus the tabernacle and all the vessels of the sanctuary under the law were sanctified. No change took place in their qualities, but only in their appropriation and use—They were sanctified by *consecration*. And there are some who contend that in this sense only are we sanctified by the purpose of God. To plead for a real change of nature, for a growth in grace, or for any thing in ourselves, though not derived from ourselves, is legal, genders to bondage, and obscures the glory of the gospel. So it was always. Jude tells us of ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness: and James mentions those who relied on a faith without works, and which was dead being alone. This sense of sanctification indeed applies to the people of God, but it involves another. "The Lord hath set apart him that is *godly* for himself." "God hath from the beginning chosen them to salvation, *through* sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."

The second meaning therefore is *renovation*—Hence we read of being renewed in the spirit of our minds; of being made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the pollutions of the world through lust. There is a real operation in all the subjects of divine grace which delivers them from the power of darkness; and destroys the love of sin; and renders true holiness their delight and pursuit. Paul therefore says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of the mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God—The latter depends upon the former. We cannot be consecrated to God till we are renovated. The reason is that by nature we are depraved, and have no love to God or concern to please him. But when this divine change takes place,

then what God purposed is actually exemplified, and we dedicate ourselves to him, considering ourselves as no longer our own, and using all we are, and all we have to his service and in his praise.

Hence sanctification is more than natural amiableness, outward reformation, and mere morality. Morality does not include holiness, but holiness includes morality, and makes provision for it in the surest and noblest way.

Sanctification too is not confined to any particular faculty, but extends to the whole nature of man. We read of being sanctified wholly, body, soul, and spirit. The work is not finished in any part, but it is begun in every part. There is a difference between the operations of art and of life. The progress of the former is successional, the latter simultaneous. The painter or the sculptor while advancing one part of the picture or the statue leaves for a time the rest: but in a flower and a tree the whole goes on at once towards maturity. The child is not a man, but he has all the lineaments and faculties, and though they are imperfect, they grow together to manhood in due time—So it is with the Christian.

How defective are they in their religious views and concerns who do not look to the Lord Jesus as the Sanctifier as well as the Redeemer! If I wash thee not, says he, thou hast no part in me. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

APRIL 18.

"*Casting all your care upon him.*"—1 Peter v. 7.

To understand this injunction two remarks will be necessary.

First, the Apostle refers to cares pertaining to the life that now is. As to the affairs of the life to come, we are not only permitted but required to be careful. Yea we are commanded to "seek first," that is, before all other things, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." And it is to enable us to pursue these objects in a manner becoming their importance, that other cares are forbidden. Yet,

Secondly, The Apostle does not design, even in temporal interests, to dispense with a wise use of means and a strict attention to duty. For these are encouraged in other parts of Scripture, and every word of God is pure. "The hand of the diligent maketh fat." "The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and is punished." "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." Hence also the general caution. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." If professors of religion therefore, under a notion of casting all their care upon the Lord, neglect exertion, refuse opportunities of improving their condition, and in their expenses exceed their income, they are tempting God but not trusting in him. And Paul, a very compassionate man, made no scruple to enjoin, "If any will not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." Jacob had to meet his brother Esau who was coming towards him in the fury of revenge. But what does he? He does all that his means would admit, or his prudence could dictate. He divides his company, sends forward a present, studies a soft answer which turneth away wrath; and *then* retires and casts all his care on him who cared for him, and made even his enemy to be at peace with him. Why did not his father and mother throw Moses into the river at once? God could have easily preserved him, and the deliverance would have been the more remarkable. But as if every thing depended upon their diligence and precaution, they hide him as long as possible, and then build a little ark, and pitch it within and without, and when the vehicle is left in the flags, the sister is stationed to watch any favourable issue: and in *doing this* they cast all their care upon him who cared for them, and turned the shadow of death into the morning. Miracles were never mere displays of power; nor ever were they needlessly performed, or excessive in their degree and extent. Thus our Lord prepared a fish to furnish money for the temple-tax; yet he did not supernaturally transport it through the air and lay it upon the table; but ordered Peter to go to the sea and cast in his hook. And when the angel had done what was really out of Peter's power, opened the iron gates and loosened his fetters, he yet told him to put on his sandals and mantle, and follow him: for this he *could* do; and why should the angel carry him forth in his arms or on his shoulder?

But though you are not to cast your *work* upon the Lord, you are to cast your *care*. For though duty is yours, events are his. But when you have diligently and properly used the means, you are not to be of a doubtful mind, or to yield to fretfulness and impatience; but to commit your way unto the Lord, and leave the concern with him. If we go forward into the world of imagination, and busy ourselves about contingencies, we invade the Lord's province, and weary ourselves for very vanity. Who by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? But he can

take away one. He can injure himself though he cannot benefit. The sin brings its own punishment along with it. Our anxiousness hurts our health, our temper, our peace of mind, our fitness for duty and devotion. What a wretched burden it is! Well whatever makes up the depression, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." But how is this to be done? We are to cast all our care upon him two ways. First, by prayer. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God." "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." Oh what a relief!

Secondly, by faith—A firm and influential belief of his providential agency in all our concerns; a persuasion that all his ways towards us are mercy and truth; an assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." But who has faith enough for this? Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

APRIL 19.

"*For he careth for you.*"—1 Peter v. 7.

WHATEVER the world may think, religion is wisdom; and requires nothing of its followers but "a reasonable service." The privileges of a Christian are not baseless fancies; his repentance is not an ignorant sorrow; his trust in God is not a blind presumption. He is able to give a reason of the hope that is in him; and he can justify his practice as well as his expectation. How simple and satisfactory is the motive or argument here adduced to enforce the duty enjoined: "Casting all your care upon him—*for he careth for you.*" Our affairs cannot be left to negligence and uncertainty—Some one must manage them; and care for us. Now opposed to our own care is the care of God! And how much better is the one than the other? Our care is unavailing and unprofitable. And how little can we add to it from any relative resource! A friend is indeed born for adversity: and such a benefactor by counselling us in our doubts, comforting us in our sorrows, and relieving us in our necessities, is one of the greatest blessings heaven can bestow. Yet how limited as well as uncertain is human friendship! All reliance on creature help is leaning on a broken reed, or hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water. But "blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Here is a divine friend and helper. *He* careth for us—Here is the case of a God engaged for us—That is of a Being possessed of infinite perfections. Here is a care attended by unerring knowledge; by almighty power; by a goodness, a kindness, a tenderness, a patience, a fidelity that knows no bounds. Surely all these advantages combined in him who careth for us, must render his care all-sufficient for every purpose, and discharge our minds from every solicitude.

But what evidence have we that he *does* care for us? The fact is certainly astonishing; and when we reflect upon God's majesty and holiness, and our meanness and unworthiness, we may well exclaim with David, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him!" Or with Job, "What is man that thou shouldest magnify him; that thou shouldest set thy heart upon him; that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment!" Yet nothing is more true. It is involved in the first essential principle of religion, and upon which all its duties are founded: for "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." We are commanded to pray to God; but for what purpose if he takes no interest in our concerns? We are required to bless and praise him; but for what reason, if he dispenses our blessings by accident, and not from disposition and design? He also takes care for oxen. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens that cry. He openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Now we may reason from the less to the greater—And hence the Saviour says to his disciples, "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" The relations in which he stands prove the same. If he professes himself to be the Shepherd, the King, the Husband, the Father of his people, will he not care for his sheep, his subjects, his bride, his offspring? His promises are exceeding great and precious, and adapted to all our wants and fears. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle

upon thee." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Is not this the language of one that careth for us? Review his doings for proof of this; for as we have heard so have we seen in the city of our God. What says the history of his people in all generations? Who cared for Noah when the deluge was coming on, and said, Come thou and all thy house into the ark? Who cared for David, and appeared for him in all his dangers and tribulation? Who restrained the lions and the flames that they should not touch Daniel and his companions? Whose angel stood by Paul in the storm, and said, Fear not, Paul, when all hope that they should be saved was taken away? And what says your own experience? Has he not cared for you from the womb? In childhood? In youth? In manhood? In every period of life? In every condition? In every difficulty? In every distress? And having cared for you so long, will he abandon you now? Having sought you when enemies, will he forsake you now he has made you friends? Having not spared his own son, but delivered him up for you; will he withhold any good thing from you?

"But if he cared for us, why are we so afflicted?" This instead of being an objection furnishes a proof. Your trials evince his care. You are children under discipline—And if you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not. "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." The husbandman prunes the vine *because* he cares for it, and wishes it to bring forth more fruit. The artificer puts the gold into the furnace because he values and wishes to improve it.

How enviable is the portion and experience of Christians! The world indeed knoweth them not. They can only see their outward condition; and because this is often poor and afflicted, they are ready to think that they are miserable and melancholy. But how differently would they think if they could see their inward security and composure—If they could see how they rise above those changes which ruffle and terrify others—If they could see how, while the men of the earth fret and turmoil and are devoured by the sorrow of the world that worketh death, they have, even in this vale of tears, an asylum where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

But alas! we often hold forth Christians as they ought to be, rather than as they are. It is lamentable that they do not more fully improve their resources, and live up to their privileges. Hence, that care which they are allowed and commanded to resign, and which their heavenly Father and Friend is more than willing to take upon himself, they retain and even cherish to the spoiling of their comfort: and instead of their dwelling at ease, and being in quiet from the fear of evil, they are ingenious at self-vexation, and suffer in imagination more than in reality! Lord, humble us—and forgive—and teach us to profit—and lead us in the way that we should choose.

APRIL 20.

"*Consider the lilies.*"—Matt. vi. 28.

Some persons seem to have no relish for the works of nature, and therefore, "seeing many things, they observe not." Others have a taste for every thing that is fair and inviting and enchanting in the seasons of the year, and the scenery of the earth, and are never weary of walking in the forest, the meadow, and the garden. For they believe and feel that "God made the country, and man made the town." And all applaud the judgment and sensibility they discover in distinction from those mechanical beings who are only struck with what is factitious and artificial.

Yet even here one thing more is desirable and necessary. It is that while we are pleased we should be instructed; it is that while our senses are charmed our graces should be exercised; it is that wonder should be followed with adoration, and the Christian be added to the man.

It is thus the sacred writers perpetually send us to the animal and vegetable creation for impression and improvement. And thus our Saviour addressed his hearers and said, "Consider the lilies." There were many other flowers equally worthy of notice with the lilies: but he selected these as specimens, and probably because they were near him and in sight, for he was sitting on the side of a hill, and he mentions not the cultured lilies, but lilies "of *the field*."

Consider the lilies as productions of God's creating skill. All his works praise him; and what distinguishes *his* works so much from the operations of men is that they will bear examination, and that the more they are examined the more will they display the wisdom of the author. Nothing can be added to them, nothing can be taken from them—"His work is perfect." Take an artificial flower; it shows ingenuity and deceives the eye at a distance. But bring it near; observe it; compare it—and where are the life, the growth, the opening bud and blossom, the freshness, the colours, the fragrance of the living one? We sometimes admire articles of dress. The rich man was clothed "in purple and fine linen." They that are in king's houses "wear soft raiment." How exquisitely wrought are some kinds of

numan manufacture: and yet when you survey them through the microscope they appear in the rudeness and roughness of sackcloth. But the green and the white of the lily challenge the inspection not only of the eye, but of the glass, and compel you to exclaim, "This is the finger of God." If those versed in mathematical science remark that they cannot go far without meeting with something infinite, how much more must this be the case with every reflecting mind at every step he takes among the wonders of creation!

Again. Consider the lilies as objects of his providential care. This was the peculiar aim of our Lord in the admonition. He would free the minds of his disciples from all undue solicitude respecting their temporal subsistence. Therefore, says he, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" He then refers, in his own inimitable way, to each of the necessaries of life, food and clothing—"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" How simple yet convincing is the inference! God does not love the birds and the flowers as he loves you. He has not bought them with an infinite price. He has not put his Spirit within them. They are not partakers of the divine nature. They are not to endure for ever. Will he take care of the less and overlook the infinitely greater?

Consider also the lilies as emblems. First as emblems of Christ. The image indeed comes very far short of his glory, but it will help our conceptions, and serve to remind us a little of his purity, his meekness, his loveliness, and "the savour of his knowledge:" therefore, says he, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." Secondly as emblems of Christians. In all things he must have the pre-eminence, but his people are held forth in the Scripture by the same resemblances: for there is not only a union but a conformity between them. They have the same mind which was in him. They have the image of the heavenly. And therefore to express their residence in the world, and how he values them above others, he adds, "as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

Let us conclude with the words of the Church: "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and *to gather lilies*." Thus he comes into our congregations and families, and takes to himself our dear ornaments and delights. We miss them, and sigh over the loss of pious connexions. The friend who was as my own soul, the child of my bosom, the desire of mine eyes, the guide of my youth, is taken away—and the place that once knew them, knows them no more—But *He* taketh away, and who can hinder him! The whole garden is his; and he has a right to do what he will with his own. He saw them meet for the change; and they are unspeakable gainers by the removal. Other lilies when gathered fade and die; but these shall bloom for ever and ever.

APRIL 21.

"*That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*"
3 John 8.

Co-operation supposes others engaged already in the same cause. Who these were we learn from the preceding words. They are called "brethren and strangers." Yet they were not private Christians, but preachers, evangelists, missionaries who travelled to spread the savour of the Redeemer's knowledge in every place—"Because for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." The labourer is worthy of his hire; and God has ordained that they who preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel: but these men waived their right, as Paul had done while in Corinth, that they might not seem mercenary or prove burdensome. These Gentiles too might have been indisposed to afford them reception and support. Such a readiness to come forward can hardly be expected from persons *before* they have heard the word, so as to understand the importance of it. People do not make sacrifices for a thing they do not value; and they are not likely to value what they do not feel they need. We have seen infants at the funeral of a mother, instead of being affected with the scene, amusing themselves with the emblems of mortality; but nothing can be more affecting than this; and we have been ready to exclaim, Ah! ye dear babes, you little know the loss you have sustained, but as you grow up you will learn it from experience. Does the maniac ask our pity and help? He scorns them. He sings in his confinement—it is his palace—he deems himself a king. But is he not the more entitled to our compassion on this very account? So here; none are so worthy of our merciful regard as those who are perishing for lack of knowledge, but are unaffected with their condition: and it must be our concern to make them sensible of their want. In the first instance they will not come to us—we must go to them—and we must seek, if we would save, that which is lost. They wil.

not be at the charge of our messengers; others therefore must support them. And on whom are we to call for assistance but on those who have tasted the good word of life, and know by experience that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. "We ought therefore," says John, "to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth."

And such was Gaius. He was not one of those that went forth to labour among those who could not or would not entertain and supply them: but when these teachers travelled that way, he accommodated them in his house, he forwarded them on their journey after a godly sort; he furnished them with what was needful in their work; and encouraged them to apply to him in their exigences. In this, some may resemble him expressly by attentions and kindness to our evangelists at home; and as to our missionaries at a distance, and to whom we can have no immediate access, all can countenance and aid them by helping those societies which engage them and are responsible for their support. To do this is a duty. When persons are drawn in the militia, if they go not themselves they must procure substitutes. All cannot go forth among the Gentiles, but we should all contribute to those who do. We should consider them as *our* agents labouring for us—for the work is *ours* —and the command is binding upon *us*, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Nothing is to be done even in the cause of God without pecuniary aid. What an honour is conferred on property that it should be employed in the salvation of souls! Who would waste any of his resources? Who would not deny himself, to be able to become a fellow-helper to the truth that has so helped him, and can so help others? Mordecai told Esther that if she refused to exert herself for the deliverance of her people, enlargement should come from another quarter; but then she would lose the honour and blessedness of the instrumentality; and not only so, but be destroyed herself. God allows us to act in his cause; but let us not mistake the principle: he employs us for our sake, not his own. His resources are infinite: and if we decline the work, the work will not be abandoned: but we shall lose the glory and the happiness of the achievement. And who could endure the thought that in this divine undertaking he had never had any concern? But this is not all. There is danger as well as loss. Our inaction is guilt. We neglect the use of the finest opportunity for usefulness. We hide our talent in the earth. Our indifference is rebellion to the call of God. "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?" "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

APRIL 22.

"*If God were your Father ye would love me*"
John viii. 42.

Some are so full of self-conceit and self-sufficiency, that they seem to consider themselves the standard of all worth and excellency; and are disposed to judge of others principally if not only, by their regard to *them*. If you dislike *them*, you are worthless; but just in proportion as you esteem and admire *them*, you rise in value. And such is the injustice of our fallen nature, that we are pleased with commendations which we know we do not deserve; and court praise for abilities and qualities which we are sure we do not possess.

It was not so with Christ. He was meek and lowly in heart; and if he spoke highly of himself, it was not from pride and vainglory, but from the necessity of the case. He knew himself; he knew his importance to us; and he knew that we ought to be acquainted with it. Therefore he said, "Come unto me"—"I am the light of the world"—"I am the bread of life"—"I am the way, the truth, and the life"—"This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." He knew that God's relation to us could only be determined by our regard to himself, and therefore he was authorized and required to say, "If God was your Father you would love me." There can be no doubt of this; for he that belongs to God will resemble him; he will love peculiarly what God loves peculiarly; and he will love supremely what God loves supreme.y: and "this," says he, "is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "Mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."

It is a great thing to have God for our father —not by creation, in which sense all mankind are his offspring; but by adoption and regeneration. What an honour! What a blessedness! To be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty! To have free and invited access to him! To share in all the love and pity of his heart! To be authorized to depend upon him for instruction, and correction, and defence, and support! To be heirs of God, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us!

But how are we to ascertain this privilege? By our regard to Christ—if God is our Father we love him. Now this love, though not a passion, is a real, powerful, influential principle; and it is the mainspring of action in the Christian life. There are two modes of determining our love to him. The First is to

consider him relatively, and observe how we are affected towards those parts of him, so to speak, with which we are constantly coming more immediately into contact. There is "the Lord's day"—Do I love this; and can I call the Sabbath a delight? There is "the word of Christ"—Can I say "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart?" He has a house for his name—Can I say, "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth?" He has a seed to serve him—Do I pray, "Remember me with the favour thou bearest unto thy people?" They are "the excellent of the earth"—Is all my delight in them? If I love him, I shall love every thing that is his.

The Second is to consider how our attachment to any other object affects us. If I love an object, I naturally, unavoidably, frequently, pleasantly *think* of it. Can I love Christ and not have him much in my thoughts? If I love an object, I am led to *speak* of it: I cannot help referring to it, and recommending it: out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. What reason have I to conclude that I love Christ, unless he often enters my discourse; and I feel myself at home while talking of his glory? If I love a friend, I shall desire nearness to him and communion with him. And how can I love Christ, unless I mourn his absence, and long after intercourse with him, especially in his ordinances—"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" If I love a benefactor, I shall inquire how I can make suitable returns for his kindness; I shall be afraid to grieve him; I shall be anxious to please him; I shall be willing to make sacrifices for his sake. Do I discover the same disposition towards Christ?

This yields a dreadful reflection with regard to some. They are those who do not love Christ—God is not their Father. They are the children of the devil. And the lusts of their Father they will do, and with him and his angels, and all who "cannot love," they will have their portion for ever—"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."

APRIL 23.

"*Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*"—1 Tim. i. 16.

THE Lord Jesus never acts without design; and his purposes are worthy of himself. When we consider its capacity and duration, the evils from which it is rescued, and the blessings to which it is advanced, the salvation of *one soul* is a work infinitely greater than the deliverance of a whole country from civil bondage; and therefore there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth. Yet in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus his aim did not terminate in *his* salvation, all-important as it was. He looked far beyond, and intended that it should bear influentially on the recovery of others to the end of time.

And thus we see the greatness of his beneficence. Men wish to have their goodness known; but it is from self-love, and not from kindness. It is to gain applause, and not to excite and bring others to their door. And therefore they sometimes enjoin those they relieve to say nothing of their bounty, not from humility but economy, lest applications should be too numerous. But the Lord Jesus knows his resources; and is not afraid of multiplied importunity. He wishes his favours to be known, that others may come and be relieved; for he delighteth in mercy.

How many principles are involved in the design here expressed!—The subjects of divine grace believe on him to life everlasting.—A succession of these believers will arise from age to age.—They will find it no easy thing to believe on him, and will feel their need of strong consolation.—Encouragement is necessary; for nothing can be done without hope and confidence.—The Saviour is concerned to furnish the relief.—And in doing this he produces actual examples of the freeness and fullness of his grace. Facts strike; they furnish us with sensible evidence. A debtor frankly forgiven an immense sum when going to prison, and having nothing to pay, shows forth most impressively the clemency of the creditor. The goodness of a prince appears in pardoning the greatest crimes against him. This indeed is rarely done among men. In all acts of grace, some exceptions are made. The ringleaders are excluded. Their impunity would seem a connivance at rebellion, and would endanger the safety and welfare of the state. But he saves sinners, says the Apostle, of whom I am chief. Here the ringleader of the persecutors, who gave unity to their counsels, and stimulus to their zeal, is laid hold of, not to be punished but pardoned—laid hold of too for this purpose in the very act of rebellion and treason—and made a pattern of mercy to encourage others to trust in him.

We know what effect this kindness had upon himself. It changed his mind. It melted his heart. It softened the lion into the lamb. Behold, he prayeth—prayeth to him whom a moment before he had abhorred—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And from that moment the love of Christ constrained him to live to him that died for him and rose again.

What effect has it upon us? Do we continue in sin that grace may abound! God forbid. "No man can quicken his own soul. We cannot change our own heart. The Bible is a sealed book till we are enlightened. It is useless for us to pray without the Spirit. If we belong to his people he will call us in due time"—This is the devil's reasoning; and it is not the better for employing the language of Scripture, or of perverted orthodoxy. And what a proof is it that we are not yet sensible of our lost condition—If we were we could not sit still, and thus argue or cavil. We should resemble a man who found himself in a house on fire—he *must* move—he *could* not avoid striving to escape, though at first perhaps not by the right passage. What a proof is it that we are not really desirous of salvation! else we should say, "I have read Paul's case. It meets my condition. I am unworthy; so was he. But he obtained mercy; and why should I be refused?"

This is the proper use of it—I see in this model his power and his compassion—I will go to his footstool, and cry, "Lord, save, I perish;" "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

It should equally encourage us with regard to others. Despondency chills our zeal, and prevents our efforts to save others. But why should we cease to pray, and use all the means within our power? Duty is ours; and none of our fellow-creatures are beyond his reach who called by his grace a Saul of Tarsus.

Blessed Jesus! Thou art fairer than the children of men! But while we admire thee we would also resemble. May thy mind be in us! Art thou so long-suffering towards us, and shall we bear with nothing in our brethren? Art thou so ready to forgive, and shall we be revengeful? Didst thou when rich for our sakes become poor, and shall we be masses of pure selfishness, and never deny ourselves to promote the welfare of others?

APRIL 24.

"*And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South. And he went on his journeys from the South even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.*"—Gen. xiii. 1, 3, 4.

In this movement of Abram two things are noticed—whence he came—and whither he went.

"He went up out of Egypt." But how came he there? He was driven by famine. Skin for skin, yea all that a man hath will he give for his life. Abram therefore was justified in going thither. We are not to starve if we can obtain subsistence lawfully. We tempt God if we do not avail ourselves of the means and opportunities of relief and assistance which he affords us in the course of his providence. For though we are to cast our care, we are not to cast our duty upon the Lord; and it is only in the way of duty that we can trust in him. But we may be found in places and conditions at the call of duty or necessity in which we are not to abide. Naomi and the Shunamite who had fled to Moab in the dearth, returned like true Israelites when they heard that the Lord had visited his people with bread. And Abram did not settle in Egypt, but only sojourned there. He had succeeded while there, so as to increase in wealth, and Egypt was at this time the most famous country on earth: but it had been to him a place of temptation; it was irreligious; and Canaan was the land which the Lord had shown him—the land of promise. And what is this world to us if we are the children of Abram by faith, but a temporary residence? It is not our home—it is not our rest. And we must arise and depart hence now, in thought, affection and pursuit; and by a readiness to leave it actually whenever our change comes. If we are the heirs of promise, Canaan will draw us out of Egypt.

"And he went on, even to Beth-el." There he had dwelt before. It is affecting to return to a place where we formerly resided. Who can help reflecting upon his sins there? (for wherever we have lived we have proved ourselves to be sinners,) and the blessings he enjoyed there; and his trials; and the changes which have taken place, and the progress of his time since! But Abram had not only dwelt at Beth-el, but dwelt there as a man of faith, piety, and prayer. What a difference is there between returning to a place where we lived without God in the world; and to one where we loved and served God, and walked with him, and said of many a spot, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

Observe how pleasingly and significantly this is expressed with regard to Abram—He came "unto the place where *his tent* had been *from the beginning*, between Beth-el and Hai; unto the place of *the altar* which he had made there *at the first*—and *there* Abram called on the name of the Lord." Thus we see his devotion here was not a *novelty*—it had been a constant usage. As soon as he had pitched a *tent* for himself, he reared an *altar* for God. Where he resided, he sacrificed and worshipped with his household. And they who would be the children of Abraham must walk in his steps, and be concerned to keep up the service of God with their families. Family-worship is no recent thing. It is the good old way in which even the Patriarchs walked. I pity as well as condemn the

man who has a "tent," but no "altar." God threatens to pour out his fury upon the families that call not upon his name. Therefore says Solomon, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

—Abram thus called upon the name of the Lord, notwithstanding the character of his neighbours; for the chapter tells us "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." And they were idolaters, and vicious to a proverb. They would therefore oppose and laugh and ridicule—But Abraham was not ashamed of his glory—Yea, as he was the more bound, so he was the more disposed and determined to confess him before men. And "them that honour me," says God, "I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

APRIL 25.

"*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*"—1 Tim. v. 23.

It may at first seem strange that Paul should only have recourse to ordinary means, such as any other person would have used on the same occasion—that he should advise and *prescribe* as a friend, instead of employing the powers he possessed as an Apostle. But as the working of miracles was a delegated prerogative, so it was limited. It was confined to particular moments and subjects. Otherwise John, instead of wishing above all things that his beloved Gaius was in health, would have healed him: and Paul would not have left his companion Trophimus at Miletum sick. Simon Magus wished to obtain the gift of working miracles for the purposes of vanity and gain. It is easy to see, from the disposition of the people to worship Paul and Barnabas when they had healed the cripple at Lystra, what a source of honour and emolument the ability would have become, had it been at the option of possessors. Even good men, being imperfect while here, might have been tempted to pervert it, or have sometimes used it with respect of persons, influenced by natural or partial affection. The effect therefore depended entirely upon the pleasure of the Almighty. How useful was Timothy! How highly did the Apostle think of him—how strongly was he attached to him—how peculiarly was he concerned for his welfare! yet though he had performed so many wonders and signs, he can only, with regard even to *him*, sympathize and pray and admonish—"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities."

But here we see the importance of health. Of all natural blessings, it is the most personal, and the most prized. It is not so much an ingredient in human happiness, as the foundation of it. With the Grecians, it was a goddess. The Lycaonians worshipped the image of health, and the women offered to it their hair, which is their glory—That is, they sacrificed ornament to health—Some females have sacrificed health to ornament. Have we ever looked into the wards of an hospital or an infirmary? Have we ever visited the sick-chamber of a friend or neighbour?—what confinement! what restlessness! what disrelishes! what loathings! what days of languishing! what wearisome nights! Health is never so valued as when it brings a letter of recommendation from sickness. Have we been the subject of it? What were *then* a well-spread table, an elegantly furnished room, the aspects of the garden and field, the charms of the favourite author! Cowper and Milton with their heavenly harps sing their songs to a heavy heart. But health is important, not only as to enjoyment, but usefulness. The discharge of almost all the duties of life depends upon it. How much is suspended upon the indisposition of a minister whose lips feed many—How much upon the illness of a wife, a mother, the mistress of the family, the centre, the eye, the hand, the soul of the domestic system! It is only at such a time and in such circumstances her utility can be fully felt. Health too has its spiritual bearings. In all the works of religion the body is the companion of the soul, but in many it is the instrument. We cannot read, or hear, or sing, or go to the house of God, without it. Many of what good people cal their temptations, and doubts, and fears, are only physical effects. The frame is disordered through which they see and feel. Hence they are affected even in their intercourse with God; and when they consider, are afraid of him. How many privileges too, in the means of grace, are they deprived of while they are the prisoners of sickness, the remembrance of which draws forth their tears.

Here we see that very good men and very useful men may be the subjects of bodily affliction. Timothy had a weakly, sickly constitution, and Paul speaks of his "frequent infirmities" or indispositions. Many other excellent individuals mentioned in the Scripture were exercised in the same way. And so it has been in every age of the Church. We are acquainted with the biography of many eminent servants of God in modern times, who prosecuted the duties of their callings under weaknesses and pains, a hundredth part of which would keep many professors of religion from the sanctuary of God, by the month or the year.—But let not the weak and sickly suppose that what has befallen them is not common to men—The same afflictions have happened to their brethren who were before them in the world. And if we knew all, we should cease to wonder at

such dispensations. The Lord's love to his people is great, but it is wise; and he regulates his measures not by their wishes, but their welfare. There is a "needs-be" for every ailment, and every pain. While he chastens, he teaches us out of his law. The tender mother overlooks none of her offspring: but the breathless tread, the pillowed couch, the knee, the bosom, the indulgence, are for the little invalid endeared by the pain he suffers, and even by the care he creates—And what says God? "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."—

We learn also that we may err on the side of deficiency as well as excess. There are always two extremes: yet in going from the one, we rarely consider that we are in any danger from the other. But wisdom leads in the way of righteousness; in the midst of the paths of judgment: and it becomes us, with regard to all our concerns and movements, to hear the word behind us saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it, when we turn to the right hand, or when we turn to the left." We may fail as to the spirit we are of, not only on the side of a bold and firm temper, but on the side of a tender and candid one. A man is required to be diligent in business, but he must not entangle himself in the affairs of this life. He ought to be economical and frugal, but he may run into closeness and meanness. Even temperance, so useful and commendable, may become a snare; and there have been instances of persons under a religious motive, injuring themselves by self-denial and abstinence. Timothy was in danger of this. He had to this time used water only, but he was following this abstemiousness too exclusively and too long: his system now required something more generous, and restorative, and strengthening: and therefore says his friend, "Drink no *longer* water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities."

As there was nothing in Paul enthusiastical, or leading him to the neglect of means and rational means, so there was nothing in him favouring of superstition. He withholds a Christian from no creature-comfort. He knew of none of those prohibitions, "Touch not, taste not, handle not," which have produced such results in the church of Rome, unless to foretell and condemn them: "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." David observes, that God bringeth forth out of the earth "*wine* that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine," as well as "bread that strengtheneth man's heart.' And his son makes no scruple to say to a good man, "Eat thy bread with cheerfulness, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God hath accepted thy works."

But we have here laid down the rules we are to observe in the use of natural refreshments. They are two; and they contain all that is necessary upon the subject. The first is moderation—"Drink *a little* wine." We should fear danger, especially in an article of indulgence. The evil steals upon us by degrees, and therefore insensibly. Who ever became intemperate at once? or without resolutions to the contrary? "Nature," says Hall, "is content with little; grace with less." The second regards our design—"for thy *stomach's* sake, and thine *often infirmities*." That is, we are to use these good things, not for the mere gratification of appetite, but to fit us for our stations, and to enable us to serve God. The former within proper bounds is a lawful use; the latter is a pious one. In the first, the creature only appears; in the second, the Christian is seen. Some live to eat and drink; some eat and drink to live. The former are the disgrace, the latter are the glory of human-kind. Even in common things the partakers of divine grace are a peculiar people—Their motives distinguish them. This turns a natural action into a spiritual duty. This also enlarges the province of their religion to the extent of all their concerns; keeps them waiting upon God all the day long; and enables them, whether they eat, or drink, or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God.

APRIL 26.

"*Willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*"—2 Cor. v. 8.

It seems impossible to read these words and not admit that Paul and his companions believed three things—That they were complex beings, and had spirits which *could* be present with the Lord when absent from the body—That there was an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, so that as soon as they were absent from the body they *were* present with the Lord—And that their being present with the Lord was the completion of their happiness and their hope.

Hence their wish. It was not an absolute desire, but a preference. Their state here under the influence of divine grace admitted of comfort, and demanded gratitude. But to depart to be with Christ was far better. They were therefore "willing *rather* to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord."

This seems to have been very much in the beginning of the gospel a common experience.

Hence we read of looking for that blessed hope; waiting for his Son from heaven; loving his appearing; hastening unto the coming of the day of God; and crying, Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus. Those also who were called by divine grace at the reformation in Germany, and at the revival of evangelical religion, in our own country, seemed familiar with death; were not shocked to be reminded of their age and infirmities; and loved to talk with each other of going home.

Yet all, yea many cannot receive this saying. Even the subjects of redemption are said to be, through fear of death, all their lifetime not actually in bondage, but subject to it. The desire of death cannot be natural; nature must abhor its own dissolution. Yet what is impossible to nature is possible to grace. We commonly find more of this willingness to leave the world among the poor and afflicted of the Saviour's followers: they have much to wean, as well as to draw: their consolations correspond with their sufferings; and the Lord is found a *very* present help in trouble. When the love of life can subserve no important purpose, it declines; and the fear of death commonly diminishes as the event approaches. Thousands who often trembled before, have at last been joyful in glory, and shouted aloud upon their beds. Clouds and darkness have obscured their day; but at eventide it has been light.

All believers have *cause* enough, if they knew it, to make them long for their removal. For to die is gain, unspeakable and everlasting gain. They then exchange faith for sight; and hope for possession; and that which is in part for that which is perfect.

And the apprehension of many of the Lord's people regards the manner of their departure rather than the effect. The parting scene; the pains, the groans, the dying strife; the separation of soul and body, and the consignment of the flesh to corruption and worms; all this leads them to say, with good Dr. Conyers, I am not afraid of death, but of dying.

And indeed all real Christians must long for the consequences; in being fully like their Saviour; and able to serve him; and to enjoy him completely. But they resemble the man whose beloved family is abroad. He would rather therefore be there than here—But while he feels the attraction, he shudders at the sea and the sickness. Watts represents the believer as loving the Canaan beyond, but dreading the Jordan between.

Well, if you really *love* the heaven of the Christian, that is, a heaven derived from being present with the Lord; fear not, but thank God and take courage. Either you will have, like the Israelites, a dry-shod march across the river; or if, like Bunyan's pilgrims, you wade through, your feet shall feel the bottom, and your eyes shall see the shining ones ready to receive you on shore. Your passage will be safe and short; and the issue an abundant entrance into the joy of the Lord.

"'Tis pleasant to believe his grace,
But we would rather see;
We would be absent from the flesh,
And present, Lord, with thee."

APRIL 27.

"*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine*"
1 Sam. xvii. 37.

These are the words of David, when he would justify himself from presumption in fighting with Goliath, who was defying the armies of the living God. It is observable that he acknowledges the *Lord* to be his deliverer. *He* delivered me; *he* will deliver me. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." To him it belongeth supremely, and in a sense only. For though we have many deliverers, they only deliver us instrumentally. The means he employs often conceal his agency, but they should lead us to it: for instrumentality implies and requires agency. Adaptation is not efficiency. However suitable a pen is to write, it is nothing without a hand to use it—Hence the question, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" In a state of nature, men are a kind of atheists: whatever be their speculative belief, they are practically without God in the world; God is not in all their thoughts. In conversion they are awakened from this dreadful insensibility and indifference; and are led to inquire after God. And they not only seek him, but find him; and not only find him, but hold communion with him; and hold communion with him, not only in his word, but in his works, not only in his ordinances, but in his dispensations. They connect him with the events of life, and this gives them a sacred importance. They connect him with their trials, and this softens them. They connect him with their comforts, and this sweetens them. And thus life becomes a continued walking with him towards that world in which "God is all in all."

David reviews his former agency—The Lord *delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear.* This happened when he kept his father's sheep. Each of these fierce and dreadful creatures took a lamb out of the flock. And he went after them. The peril was most imminent. When he forced them to drop the prey, they *rose against him;* but he caught them by the beard and smote them and slew them. He well therefore speaks of their *paw*, for it was actually upon him! This, it will be allowed, was a deliverance little less than miraculous. We have nothing, perhaps, so extraordinary

to review, yet we have had our deliverances, and some of them remarkable, at least to ourselves, if not to others. We have had our bears and lions; but we have not been given over a prey to their teeth. We have had spiritual deliverances. We have been saved from the curse of the law; from the power of Satan; from the tyranny of the world; from the dominion of sin. We have had temporal deliverances. Some of these have been visible, but many more have been invisible: and it is owing to our having obtained help of God, that our lives, and families, and substance, and all our outward estate, have been preserved. And if at any time our comforts have been invaded and injured, it has been for a moral benefit; and he has enabled us to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

David hopes for his future agency—"He *will* deliver me from this Philistine." For after the beasts of prey, here is another, and more formidable foe. We must always rejoice with trembling; and never boast ourselves of to-morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth. Because some storms have expended themselves, we must not reckon upon perpetual sunshine; the clouds return after the rain. When we have slain the lion and the bear, we may be called to encounter Goliath—Well—and we may meet him undismayed if the Lord be with us. He who has delivered will deliver. And like David—

We should draw confidence from reflection. We have not only his promise to encourage us, but our experience; and because he has been our help, therefore under the shadow of his wing should we rejoice. We cannot certainly infer what men will be from what they have been, or what they will do from what they have done. They are variable; but the Lord changeth not. They may become unable, if their intentions are the same; but in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Neither should a sense of our unworthiness weaken our expectation from him: we were unworthy when he first took knowledge of us; and he deals with us, not according to our desert, but his own mercy and grace.

Wherefore let us observe the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and treasure them up in our minds. We know not what occasions we may have for the use of them. But in every tendency to depression, let us not yield to our infirmity, but remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

APRIL 28.

"*So that I might finish my course with joy.*"
Acts xx. 24.

. Does this imply any apprehension as to the event? It is no more than he enjoins upon others: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." It certainly expresses great desire and great anxiousness. He deemed nothing too much to do or to suffer for such a privilege.

But how is it to be understood? We may take two views of it. We may consider the Christian as finishing his course with joy to others, and with joy to himself. The latter is principally intended. But did you ever stand by the side of a dying bed, and, when your connexion was suffering severely, and all hope of recovery was taken away, have you not been glad when the struggle was over? Yes. You rose above selfishness; and could say, "Our loss is his gain. Shall we weep at his deliverance from sorrow, temptation, and sin? and his entering into the joy of his Lord? If we loved him we should rejoice, because he said, I go unto the Father."

And when he finished well, have you not hailed him on another account? "Well, thy sun is gone down without a cloud. I feared for thee, but the danger is now over. Thou hast had to go through a defiling world, but thou hast kept thy garments clean. Thou hast had fears within and fightings without, but thy heart has not turned back, neither have thy steps declined from his way. We crown thee now. Servant of God, well done."

But when the Christian finishes his course with joy, it mainly refers to himself, and regards his dying experience. There is a great difference in the departure of believers. Some reach heaven, so to speak, in a kind of wrecked state; they get safe to land, but on planks and broken pieces of the ship. Others, in full sail, enter the desired haven; and have, as the Apostle Peter calls it, "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of their Lord and Saviour." Some die perplexed with doubts, and depressed with fears; others have the full assurance of hope: they are joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon their beds; and their dying chamber is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace." This joy does not depend upon outward things; for in common, God's poor and afflicted people have the greatest degrees of it. Neither is it according to previous confidence, for many who have been all their life-time *subject* to bondage through fear of death, have been filled at last with all joy and peace in believing. Now we lay no stress upon the want of this dying confidence and comfort, as an evidence against the safety of a man, when his life has been godly and consistent; for we know not how far it may be the effect of temperament or disease. Yet it is very desirable to enjoy it. We shall need all the comfort we can get when heart and flesh fail us, and friends can afford us no assistance, and the enemy of

souls may be particularly busy, knowing that his time is short. It is also very useful. It has often impressed the careless, confirmed the doubting, and encouraged the timid. And how has it glorified God, by showing the power of his grace, and recommending his service! Except for this, a Christian would desire a sudden death, and escape "the pains, and groans, and dying strife:" but he is more than reconciled to bear them, if Christ is thus magnified in his body by death, as well as by life.

But this finishing his course with joy, takes in the issue, as well as the conclusion. If it ends with heaven, it ends well, whatever be the experience immediately preceding. If the Christian were to leave this world in darkness and uncertainty, that darkness would be instantly dispelled, and all would be quietness and assurance for ever. Thus even Cowper finished his course with joy, for the gloom vanished in glory—and how ecstatic must have been the surprise of his blessed spirit, to feel itself in the possession of a boon it had long despaired to find!

All who have gone before us at death finished their course; but many finished it with joy. How will you finish yours? The Lord has appointed us bounds which we cannot pass. We have an allotted course of service and suffering; and the end is sure—and the end is nigh. Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of *that* man is peace. *He* shall enter into rest; and be for ever with the Lord. But how will *you* end? will you be defeated or crowned? will you be clothed with shame, or shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father? O let it be your prayer and care to realize this final blessedness; and endeavour to judge of every thing now as it will affect you at last.

Even a Balaam could admire the tents of Jacob, and the tabernacles of Israel; and was compelled to exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Yet he died fighting against the people he had blessed and envied. Such a difference is there between conviction and practice; and so absurd is it to look for the end without the way.

Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. But if you die out of him, unpardoned and unrenewed, you must finish your course with grief.—Grief to others, to ministers, to Christians, to godly friends and relations.—Grief to yourselves. The sorrows of life may be diverted by company, by amusements, by the hurry of business. A man may drink and forget his sorrow, and remember his misery no more. But your drinking days will be then over, and you will be near a state where you will call in vain for a drop of water to cool your tongue. Your associates will then forsake you, or be found miserable comforters. If they are cruel enough to jest about religion then, you will not be able to relish it, while fearing that all may be true which you have treated as false. Nature will have then closed the doors against every worldly diversion. You can no more attend the playhouse and the race-ground. All that before was vanity, will now be vexation of spirit. Riches profit not in the day of wrath. What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? But should you have no time for reflection; or be incapable of exercising reason; or conscience be unawakened: should you through the power of delusion have no bands in your death, and your strength be firm; should you fall asleep like a lamb, you will awake with the devil and his angels. There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked.

APRIL 29.

"*Who comforteth us in all our tribulations.*"
2 Cor. i. 4.

This reminds us of the nature of the Christian life. It is "neither clear nor dark." It partakes both of tribulation and comfort. The tribulation endears the comfort; and the comfort relieves and gilds the tribulation.

Paul does not say he comforts us by keeping us out of all tribulation. He could do this; but it accords not with the wisdom of his mercy. Therefore many are the afflictions of the righteous, and through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom. But *while* in the world they have tribulation, in him they have peace—and he comforts them IN ALL THEIR TRIBULATION. And he does this four ways. First, by deliverance. This is perhaps the most pleasing way to our natural feelings: and these feelings are in a measure allowable. For tribulation is not to be preferred for its own sake; neither are we to consider ourselves unsubmissive, though we are led to say, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" provided we can add, "nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." And the Lord knoweth how to deliver. If he does not find a way, he can make a way for our escape. Of old he appeared for his servants; and often constrained even their enemies to acknowledge the finger of God. Observe Joseph in Egypt, Jonah in the whale's belly, Daniel in the lions' den, and Peter in prison. "But these were miracles." They were. "And miracles are not to be expected now." They are not. But he who performed them is not far from any one of us—He is a very present help in trouble—and able to make good the word upon which he has caused us to hope; or miracles would be seen again. Nothing is too hard for the Lord; all hearts are in his hand; all events are at his control; and even now "he turneth the shadow of death into the morning." He does

not always deliver us according to our wishes and expectation; and hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and the eagerness and despondency of impatience may lead us to complain, "O when wilt thou comfort me?" But the vision is only for an appointed time; at the end it shall speak; neither will it tarry a moment beyond the season our welfare requires—"For the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him."

Secondly, by compensation. Philosophers have remarked how all through the natural world there are indications of a system of counterbalancings; so that a deficiency in one thing is remedied by some advantage in another. We see this also in human life; so that persons in their trouble are, so to say, recompensed by something which lessens the impression of their trials, and after which if they are wise they will look, for the purpose of submission and thankfulness. Hannah was barren and reproached by her fruitful rival; but she was consoled by the greater love of her husband, and who "was better to her than ten sons." Mephibosheth while an infant was lamed on both his feet; but owing to this accident his life was preserved when the other princes of the house were destroyed. Thus bodily deformity is sometimes relieved by superior endowments of mind. Thus a man is compelled to labour: but this gives soundness to his sleep, and appetite to his food, and vigour to his health, to which the easy and *indulged* are strangers. Paul suffered unto bonds, but the word of God, which was dearer to him than life, was not bound; and his confinement turned out rather to the furtherance of the gospel. The thorn in the flesh was continued; but instead of the removal, he had the assurance of all-sufficient grace under it; and he was more than satisfied with the compensation—yea, he gloried in it; and said, "When I am weak then am I strong." Ah! I dreaded, says the Christian, as I entered the affliction, and was laid on a bed of languishing: but prayer was made for me; a force and a tenderness of friendship were displayed of which I was not aware before—and Oh! how kind was that "Friend who sticketh closer than a brother"—"*Thou* drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; *thou* saidst unto me, Fear not."

Thirdly, by sanctification. A man may be saved in his affliction when he is not saved out of it. Affliction is a scene of great moral danger, and the enemy of souls will endeavour to turn to account what it yields in a way of temptation. It is mentioned with wonder that in all the evil that had come upon him, "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." A Christian is sometimes "afraid of all his sorrows"—afraid lest he should *sink*—afraid lest he should *sin* in the day of adversity—afraid lest he should not suffer well, and glorify the Lord in the fires; but dishonour his religion by unbelief, and discontent, and murmuring. This leads him to pray; and the Lord hears him, and *keeps* him in the evil day. He affords him also the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which confirms his faith, and strengthens his patience, and enables him to bear the rod. Some in their distresses have cursed God and died. Others have spoken unadvisedly with their lips; or they have been vengeful towards the instruments of their sufferings, or they have employed unlawful means to obtain relief, or they have attempted self-destruction. Have you been preserved? Has the furnace only severed the dross from the gold? Has the pruning-knife only lopped off the suckers that robbed the vine? Can you say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word"—Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious to you?

Fourthly, he does it by discovery. "The word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying: Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." This is no more than he does to other sufferers; it is in the hour of trouble he peculiarly fulfils the promise, "I will manifest myself unto him." "I will allure her," says he, "and bring her into the wilderness, and *there* will I speak comfortably unto her"—or as it is in the margin, speak to her heart—so speak to her as to "give her her vineyards from *thence*, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and she shall sing *there* as in the days of her youth, and in the days when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Oh! if he says to the soul, "I am thy salvation;" if he "shows you his covenant;" if he convinces you that none of your trials are casual or penal; if he assures your consciences that you are redeemed from the curse, and that you only feel the rod of a father, who uses it in kindness and tender mercy; if heaven be opened to the eye of the mind, and like Stephen you see Jesus ready to receive you, and wipe away all your tears; if you are assured that your afflictions will work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—then, though you will not be deprived of feeling, you will be raised above despondency and depression—Then, though troubled on every side, you will not be distressed—Then, though sorrowful, you will be always rejoicing—And not only so, but you "will glory in tribulation also."

APRIL 30.

"*The desire of all nations.*"—Haggai ii. 7.

That this refers to the Messiah is unquestionable. Yet there seems some necessity for

explaining the title given him, as it apparently disagrees with the language of other parts of Scripture, and with fact. Is he not despised and rejected of men? He was in the world, and the world was made by him; and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. How then can he be called the desire of all nations? The character is justified five ways.

First, by the general expectation that prevailed in the world previously to his advent. It is well known that there was such a looking out for some great deliverer and benefactor as nigh at hand. Divines have collected many testimonies from heathen authors, and have peculiarly remarked a little poem of Virgil's, written a few years only before the birth of Jesus, and which contains a kind of prophecy, foreshowing that some extraordinary personage would shortly come, and restore the peace and plenty and blessings of the fancied golden reign. The sentiment had been conveyed down by tradition, but it was originally derived from a divine source, the early and repeated promise of "him that should come."

Secondly, by the need all mankind had of such a Saviour as he was to be. The whole world was lying in wickedness. Darkness covered the earth. They knew not the supreme good. They found only vanity and vexation of spirit in their pursuits and attainments. They had no support under the troubles of life. Their uneasinesses arising from guilt, death, and futurity, made them often willing not only to offer thousands of rams, and rivers of oil, but to give the first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. But no remedy could they find to remove the doubts and fears of their consciences—The Lord Jesus meets the condition they were in; and therefore though they had no revelation of him, yet they were groping ignorantly after what alone he could impart; and therefore he deserves to be called the desire of all nations, just as a physician, able and willing to cure all diseases, is the desire of all patients.

Thirdly, by being entirely attractive in himself, so that all would actually long after him if they knew him. He has every excellency in his person, every perfection in his character. There is nothing in creation that will afford a proper image of his glory. All the lovelinesses of men and angels shrink from a comparison with his charms—"How great is his beauty!"—"Yea, he is altogether lovely." Do we esteem riches? His riches are unsearchable. Do we admire friendship? He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Do we applaud benevolence? His love passeth knowledge. He comes down like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench. He delivers the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper—

> "His worth if all the nations knew,
> Sure the whole earth would love him too."

Fourthly, by his having had admirers in every country. Wherever believers have been found, they have been all distinguished by the same convictions and dispositions with regard to him. Abraham in Canaan rejoiced to see his day, saw it and was glad. Job in the land of Uz said, I know that my Redeemer liveth. Moses in Egypt esteemed his reproach. Wise men came from Persia and paid him homage. Devout men from every nation under heaven came to the temple at Jerusalem, and joined in the ceremonies and sacrifices of which he was the substance and the end. And John heard his praise from a multitude which no man could number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. For,

Lastly, he is so named, because in due time he will be prized and gloried in by all the ends of the earth. To him, said the dying Patriarch, shall the gathering of the people be. He is the salvation, says Simeon, prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him; all nations shall call him blessed.

But let me not lose myself in general reflections. How does this desire of all nations appear to me? Has he been revealed in me the hope of glory? Is he all my salvation and all my desire? Can I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord? Do I love the people who resemble him? Do I value the ordinances in which I can enjoy communion with him? Will it complete my happiness to be like him and see him as he is?

MAY 1.

"*Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*"—John xiv. 22.

Judas Iscariot had already sold his master, and was now busy in betraying him into the hands of his enemies. We are sometimes ready to wonder by what potency of diabolical agency he could be carried to such a degree of wickedness. But when we are informed that he was covetous, the mystery is explained. Then we have a cause fully adequate to any effect: "for the love of money is the root of all evil."

But there was another Judas among the Apostles. He was the brother of James; the author of the last inspired epistle of the New Testaments; and a faithful follower of Jesus—*He* was the present inquirer. We may be good and happy under any name. Yet there are names that seem ominous and odious. It must have been painful for this excellent man

to be called by the name of the infamous wretch who had sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. John therefore distinguishes him. We should learn from his example to be careful, in relating facts, not to confound persons. For want of an attention to this, what is only true of one individual is applied to another; and not only mistake, but mischief frequently ensues. You can never talk safely after some people: they are sure to *suppress*, or *omit*, or *perplex*. How little is *circumstantial* truth attended to!

It is not always easy to determine the principle of an action. We commonly look for a single cause, when perhaps several excitements have operated though not equally. A late popular senator, Mr. Whitbread, often said, no man ever acted from a single motive. Whence sprang the question of Judas?

Was it the language of grateful surprise? "How is it that we should be selected? and thus honoured and indulged?" This is the disposition of the subjects of divine grace. They do not think more highly of themselves, because they are made to differ from others. Not unto us, O Lord; not unto us. Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house?

Or was it the language of doubt? He *seems* to question whether the Lord *could* come and manifest himself to them without others seeing and knowing it. If he really thought so, it was very weak and foolish; but he spake in haste, and without reflection. He might easily have known the possibility, in a thousand cases, of communicating ourselves to a friend while every one else remains ignorant of the transaction. And if others could not do it, was it becoming in Judas to measure the Saviour by their capacity? What is marvellous in their eyes is not marvellous in his. It was enough that he had said it. He never promises what he is not able to perform—And never should we ask, after any of his declarations, "How can these things be?"

Or was it the language of curiosity? He might have admitted the reality of the thing, but wished to know the circumstances, and the mode of the manifestation. There is too much of this tendency of mind in all of us, so that we leave what is plain and useful, to pry into what is dark and unprofitable; and wish to explore the secret things which belong unto God, instead of being satisfied with those which are revealed, and which are for us and for our children. Thus time is wasted, the attention is drawn off from the main concern, the temper is injured by dispute, and the words of the Apostle verified, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." Jesus therefore would not gratify the inquirer after the number of the saved: and when Peter asked him after the destiny of John, he reproved him, saying, "What is that to thee? follow thou me:" and when his Apostles would dive into prophecy, he said, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put into his own power."

But let us always take things in their most charitable construction. Perhaps it was the language of allowable desire. He felt the condescension and kindness of Jesus: he considered the privilege as an inestimable favour: but having little acquaintance with it, he wished to know more of it, to regulate himself accordingly, so as not to lose, but secure and improve the privilege. This is the more probable, as our Saviour does not blame him, but gives him an answer. This he would not have done had Judas spoken superciliously or impertinently; and not in the spirit of a learner. He did not answer Pilate; nor indulge Herod; nor suffer those to remain in the room who laughed him to scorn when he raised the ruler's daughter. But he favours and satisfies Judas: "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Hence, while we oppose a doubtful, curious, and speculative turn of mind, we should not repulse humble and useful inquiries. There are difficulties of an *experimental* and a *practical* nature with regard to duties and privileges which it is possible and desirable to remove. And there is no one to whom we can carry them so proper as he to whom this inquirer addressed himself—and not in vain

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MAY 2.

"*Ye were a curse.*"—Zech. viii. 13.

When Elihu asked Job, with regard to the Supreme Being, "If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him?" He adds; "Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art." The injury one man is capable of doing to another is incalculable; and it will never be known in this world what a curse the sinner has been. The corrupt always become, as Isaiah calls them, "children that are *corrupters*." They are concerned to bring others into the same course and condition with themselves; and as, owing to the depravity of our nature, we are much more accessible to evil than to good, they are rarely successless in their endeavours. In addition to their invitations and enticings, and, if they have power, their frowns and menaces; how impressive is the force of example! and how does the presence of vice familiarize it to the mind, and weaken the restraints of fear and shame! "One sinner destroyeth much good."

It seems hard that the wife and children of Achan should have been stoned and burnt with himself. And nothing could have been more affecting than the sight and cries of these victims of his guilt, especially if he had any

feeling, to the man himself. And the Deist here rages against the Bible. But the Bible only records the fact; and the Deist is perpetually meeting with similar things in his own book of nature. He sees what his Omnipotent Goodness does not interfere to prevent,—one suffering from the vileness of another. He sees the wife and children reduced to want, beggary, infamy, disease, death; by an idle, drunken, stealing, licentious husband and father.—This should be one of the greatest preventions of sin, that it always injures, not only ourselves, but others: and it would be so, if we had any ingenuous, noble, relative feeling. But what filial affection has that youth who can break a mother's heart, and bring down the gray hairs of a father with sorrow to the grave! Whatever be his politics, what real patriotism has he who endeavours to arm Providence against his country, and promotes "that sin which is a reproach to any people?" "I cannot exercise a better charity towards others," says Adam of Wintringham, "than by avoiding all sin myself."

As the wicked are "a curse" by injuriousness, so they are also by execution. How many suddenly curse their habitation! How are they cursed often by those who are ruined by their pride, luxury, and speculations! How will children when they meet their ungodly parents rise up against them in the judgment, and cause them to be put to death! How in the world of torment will the seduced execrate the seducer? the murdered the murderer? and the pupil of infidelity the wretch that led him into the paths of the destroyer? How dreadfully did the writer of this article once hear a fine young man, while dying, exclaim, again and again, "O curse you, Voltaire!"—Angels curse them: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof"—The Judge of all will curse them—*He* "will say unto them on his left hand, Depart, ye cursed"—

And, Christians, were you ever in danger of this? Were you ever once a curse yourselves? How humbling is the review! What godly sorrow does it call for! It seems enough to make you weep, if possible, tears of blood, to think that there are some in hell, and others going thither, whom you have led astray and encouraged! You, surely you, can never forgive yourselves! But if God has forgiven you, you ought to love much; and be concerned, as you have been a curse, to become a blessing.

MAY 3.

"*Ye shall be a blessing.*"—Zech. viii. 13.

WHAT a difference is there between the state of nature and grace! The transition from the one to the other verifies and explains the words of the prophet: "Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier, shall come up the myrtle tree." Hence says God—"As ye were a curse"—"Ye shall be a blessing."

For the change affects them not only personally, but relatively. It begins with themselves, but it extends to others; and a zealous concern for the salvation of their own souls is always accompanied with a benevolent anxiety for the salvation of their fellow-creatures. Their exertions for this purpose are indeed often ungratefully received; and they are reproachfully desired to keep their religion to themselves. But this is enjoining upon them an impossibility. They cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard—If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out—The fire must burn—The spring must rise up. Others are not only excused, but commended—even if they err in the manner, who strive to heal the sick, to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry: but Christians are called intermeddlers when *they* would exercise the noblest charity of all, which is *spiritual mercy*. Not that they neglect the body—Jesus himself did not. But he that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a *soul* from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

David therefore said, "I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." What a blessing was Andrew to his brother Peter! and Philip to his friend Nathanael! and the woman of Samaria to her fellow-citizens!—"Many believed on him for the saying of the woman." In this way God carries on his cause. He makes us the subjects of his grace, and then the mediums and the instruments. He could call fifty at once in a village. But what is commonly the case? One is called first. He soon pities the condition of others; and he goes to the minister by whom he was awakened, and informs him of the ignorance of his poor neighbours, and says, "Come over and help us." He goes; and a number believe and turn unto the Lord. A single grain of corn will produce several ears; these ears will produce many ears more; and the increase in time will be sufficient for the semination of a field, a province, a country—So says God of his people, "I will sow them in the earth." Thus churches are raised. Thus kingdoms are evangelized.

Why are good men called "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof?" "The salt of the earth?" "The light of the world?" "A dew from the Lord?" But to express the advantages others derive from them. And who can tell the extent of the benefits produced by their prayers, example, and influence? We are persuaded that none of them are useless: and he who has been the means of the salvation of one soul, has done more than the hero who has delivered a whole empire from

civil bondage—for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth"—But what blessings have some individuals proved! Think of Howard in his journeys of compassion—of Thornton and Reynolds in the diffusions of their bounty—of Luther in the work of the reformation—of Watts in his psalms and hymns—of Whitfield in his preaching—of a father and mother who bring up a family of children in the fear of the Lord—of the two or three individuals that brought Christianity to this favoured country—of the few missionaries who landed in the South-Sea Islands, and induced whole communities to turn from dumb idols to serve the true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven!!

But they are made a blessing not only as they bless others, but as they are blessed by them. With regard to Joseph's offspring, the dying patriarch "blessed them that day, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." What did Balaam but bless them, though he was employed to curse, when he said, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel"—"The Lord his God is with them, and the shout of a King is among them"—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." And thus their very enemies are inwardly constrained to admire and extol those whom they pretend to despise, and in words even revile. But how cordially are they blessed by those to whom they have been useful! With what satisfaction does Job speak of this—"When the ear heard me it blessed me"—"The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me." "Blessed be my mistress," says a servant: "I was ignorant as a heathen when I entered her family; but she has led me into the way everlasting." "Blessed for ever be my precious mother," says many a child, "whose easy and gentle endeavours brought me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Their fellow-christians bless them as their brethren, companions, and helpers. Ministers say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord." "And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among all people: all that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the seed which the *Lord* hath blessed"—For, "Come," will the Judge say, "Come, ye blessed of *my Father*, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

MAY 4.

"*And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*"—Luke xxiv. 52, 53.

This was the consequence of the affecting transaction recorded in the preceding verses. "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven"—Upon this four things are recorded of these *blessed* disciples.

First, their adoration of him—"They worshipped him." Full of astonishment, and straining their eyes to follow him in his traceless flight, they were *standing* when he had ascended: and hence the angelic messengers said, "Why *stand* ye gazing up into heaven?" They then kneeled, and prostrated themselves upon the ground—and "worshipped him." And what was this worship? It was nothing less than *Divine*. It was addressed to a being now absent, and whose senses therefore could not advertise him of the homage: for they not only worshipped, but worshipped *him*. The enemies of the present truth are embarrassed with the case of Stephen. They cannot deny that *he* prayed to Christ, when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But they reply, that he *saw* Christ "standing on the right hand of God:" and *therefore* addressed him; conceding that to have addressed him in this manner, had he been absent and invisible, would have been no less than idolatry. Yet not to observe that the petitions themselves were very strange ones, to offer to a creature, even if present and in sight, we find prayer addressed to him when he was undeniably invisible and absent. Paul speaks of "all who called upon the name of the Lord Jesus." In his own prayer for the Thessalonians he mentions him, even before the Father. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." And the disciples here worshipped him after "he was carried up into heaven."

Secondly. Their obedience—"And they returned to Jerusalem." We call this obedience, because he had expressly enjoined it. "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." "Being assembled together with them, he *commanded* them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father." It was all along foretold that the Christian dispensation was to commence from the metropolis of Judea. "The Lord shall send the rod of his strength out of Zion." "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." There Jesus died and rose again. There the Apostles were to open their commission; and the Holy Spirit was to be poured down to qualify them to preach the Gospel to every creature At this time Judea was the centre of the

known world; for America was not yet discovered, and probably not inhabited. It was the most surrounded and the most accessible situation; and therefore when the Lord made the feast unto all people, he spread it upon this mountain; the table was in the middle of the room. It would be an evidence in favour of Christianity that it was published immediately on the spot where the facts were alleged to have occurred. And it would show the compassionate disposition of the Founder, that he would have repentance and remission of sin in his name to be published first at Jerusalem. Hence he required their return thither. And they, instead of fleeing or concealing themselves, repaired back to a place full of danger—a place where lately they had killed their master, and would be still more likely to hate and persecute themselves. This would be a great trial of their obedience. They were going like lambs into a lair of wolves. But they had nothing to do with events. They knew his order for their conduct; and the path of duty is the path of safety. Yea, we see,

Thirdly, their gladness; for they not only returned, but "with great joy." This seems surprising. He is a bad relation, we say, that is not missed. How we feel the removal of a friend or a minister who has been useful to us! and not to feel, would be a criminal insensibility. What a loss then did the disciples sustain when deprived of their Lord and Saviour who had always guided, preserved, and comforted them! Accordingly, when the intimation was first given, sorrow filled their hearts. But we here see the advantage of knowledge. For he had opened their understandings, and explained to them the Scriptures: and they now saw—That though he was going to leave them as to his bodily presence, he would be with them spiritually—That his departure would result in his own exaltation and glory—That it was also expedient for themselves that he went away—That he would appear in the presence of God for them, and be their advocate with the Father—That he would be able to make all things work together for their good—That he would prepare a place for them, and come again and receive them unto himself, that where he was they might be also. And what could they want more to induce them to rejoice? But,

Fourthly, they were as grateful as they were joyful—"And were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." That is, they constantly repaired thither at the seasons of devotion. For we read that "when" upon their return to Jerusalem "they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." But their private engagements did not keep them from the public services of the sanctuary as often as they returned. We are not to forsake the house of our God: and we are to "enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise." It is easy to see what was the cause of their excitement, and which led them to magnify the Lord, and to exalt his name together. They blessed and praised him for all his mercies, but above all, for his unspeakable Gift—That he was delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification—That he ever lived to make intercession for them That he had taken possession of heaven on their behalf—and that in him they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Let us cherish the same disposition, and follow their example. And let our gratitude be real and practical. Let us show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives. "God is the Lord, which hath showed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

MAY 5.

"*Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.*"
1 Cor. xv. 32.

When Isaiah had foretold the invasion of Judea by the Chaldeans; "And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine—let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die." If we quote the Wisdom of Solomon, it is not because we consider it inspired Scripture, but as evidence to support the common prevalence of this wretched sentiment at the period it was written: "For our time is a very shadow that passeth away: and after our end, there is no returning: for it is fast sealed, so that no man cometh again. Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present: and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments: and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness: let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this." This indeed in all ages and countries has been the manual of devotion for those worshippers whose god is their belly, who glory in their shame, and mind earthly things.

It admits a fact too clear to be questioned. The living know that they shall die. The

very men before us confess it; yea, they acknowledge that the event is not only certain, but near—"*To-morrow* we die." And this was true; for death is always near in possibility; and is never far off in reality. Yet, instead of saying, as we must die shortly, and may die soon, therefore we ought to be prepared for the event, they make it a motive to encourage licentiousness—"Let us *eat and drink*, FOR to-morrow we die." What a proof have we here of the truth of the Fall! "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live." We could as soon believe that God made fiends as that he made the human race what they now are. "God made man upright, but they sought out many inventions."

But how stands the truth of the charge with regard to us? Let none imagine that they are innocent because they have never uttered the sentiment in so many words. Your temper and actions speak louder than words—And what is *their* language? Does it not say unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" Does it not seem to avow that nothing shall disturb your carnality and carelessness? and that if life be short, you are resolved it shall not be sad?

But is the reasoning or excitement such a monstrous perversion of every thing right as it appears? Let us place it on two grounds. Are you believers in Revelation? Do you admit that there is really an eternal world, and that you are always on the brink of it? You are *then* worse than infidels, not as to your creed—this is truth, but as to your practice, which is inconsistent and senseless beyond all the power of language to express. But if you are unbelievers, if you deny a future state, and think that we are mere masses of matter, that we perish like the beasts, and nothing survives death; you are but acting consistently with your belief, and you may then well say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The present is all the happiness you know, and you would be fools not to make the most of it—Therefore we would say to you, Go on—only remarking two things. First, be sure, perfectly sure, of your premises. But you cannot demonstrate that there is no world to come, no judgment after death. The utmost you can reach is probability. If a doubt remains in a case of such tremendous import, it must be enough to break all your repose whenever it recurs, and to stamp your conduct with insanity. Probability would be sufficient to justify a man on the other side, the safe side, the side on which, if we are mistaken as to our main expectation, we must be gainers upon the whole, and present gainers; but nothing less than absolute certainty can justify *you*. When Thistlewood the traitor was ascending the drop, he said to his companions, referring to the doubtfulness of an existence after death, "We shall soon know the great secret." And so they would. Yet what madness and wretchedness to leave it undetermined till the discovery could be of no advantage, and the truth of the condemnation was proved by the execution of the sentence, and hell was seen and suffered at once! "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

Secondly, even admitting the truth of your premises, your conduct is not rational unless intemperance and luxury were the truest and highest enjoyments of life. But it would be easy to prove that they are not. It is worthy of observation that Epicurus himself, though he contemned religion in every form, and excluded a future state, and contended that pleasure was the great end of life, yet recommended the practice of universal virtue, and thought the virtues were to be cherished not on their own account, but *for the sake of pleasure*. He was himself the most plain and temperate of men, lived sparingly, and on the plainest food, always attesting that this was best not only for health, but pleasure; and employed it as a maxim, "That he lived most pleasurably who lived most temperately." We have better authority than this; and we are sure that good men have not only a thousand enjoyments of a nature which others know nothing of; but as to those kinds of pleasure which the men of the world value (unless the pleasures of sin), the pleasures of time and sense, they have by far the pre-eminence. Godliness is profitable unto all things; it has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Others may possess more, but we know who hath said, "the meek shall inherit the earth." "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment."

MAY 6.

"*And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth,*

and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."—Luke xi. 5—10.

NEVER man spake like this man. He taught as one having authority, but not as the Scribes. This applies to the manner as well as the subject of his preaching. He had nothing of official parade and unfeeling severity; but was gentle and affectionate, and came down as the rain on the mown grass. One thing cannot be overlooked—It was the easy and familiar mode in which he delivered the most important doctrine. Here were no dry definitions, no logical subtleties, no abstract reasonings, no lengthened argumentations, no abstruse allusions parading the erudition of the speaker, but darkening counsel with words without knowledge to the multitude—In his ministry the poor had the gospel; the common people heard him gladly. He commended himself to every man's conscience by a simple manifestation of the truth; and always reached the heart by appeals the most touching and tender, and by images the most natural, conclusive, and interesting. I have read treatises on repentance, but I never derived half the instruction and impression from them all that I have found in the parable of the prodigal son. We have had lectures on humility. But when his disciples were disputing for pre-eminence in his empire, "He called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Here he is teaching them to pray—but while he informs he excites and encourages. He argues from the less to the greater, and makes the contrast conduce to his aim as well as the comparison. A man indisposed to the thing itself, and even complaining of the application, may grant a request to importunity—How much more may we hope to succeed with God, whose goodness like his power is infinite!

But O the execution that is done in the filling up of the representation! It intimates, first, that in prayer we may go to God in the character of "a friend." And how pleasing and inviting is it to view the Supreme Being as standing in such a relation to us, and to know that we have not only a real but a perfect, yea, a divine friend, who is nigh unto us in all that we call upon him for. Secondly, that we may come to him at any season, even though it be "at midnight." *He* never slumbers or sleeps; never complains of surprise or interruption. We are allowed, we are commanded to pray without ceasing. David says, "Morning, and evening, and at noon will I pray and cry aloud:" and "at midnight I will rise and give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments." Never wait for a more convenient or favourable period—go to him immediately—in the midnight gloom of thy experience or condition—He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. Thirdly, that we are allowed to ask of him largely—"Send me, not a loaf, but *three* loaves." Fourthly, that we need not be ashamed to tell him our destitute and straitened condition—"I have nothing to set before him." Fifthly, that we must be earnest and persevering in our addresses. "Asking," "seeking," "knocking," are not a mere repetition, but an emphatical gradation. Importunity is not necessary to move God; but it is necessary to evince our sincerity, and to prepare us to enjoy his undeserved favours with improvement and praise. Lastly, that none who ask, and seek, and knock, shall be refused—"For *whoso* asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." We often talk of holding a man by his word; and if he be an honest man, we have nothing by which we can hold him more firmly. Here we have the assurance of truth itself. He cannot deny himself. Let us therefore take *Him* at his word, and relying on his engagement, *whoever* we are, *whatever* be our character and condition, draw near in full assurance of faith, and be filled with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

MAY 7.

"*I am pacified toward thee.*"—Ezekiel xvi. 63.

THERE can be no pacifying without previous offence and provocation. Sin rouses the displeasure of God. Therefore he says, "O do not that abominable thing which I hate!" He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The wicked shall not stand in his sight. It is no trifling thing to provoke a fellow-creature. Every one is able to injure us: but some possess larger influence and power. It is spoken of as a great disadvantage in contention, to "be as one that striveth with the priest:" and it is said, "the wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion." But to fall into the hands of the living God! Man is mortal, and soon dies. And as the injury he inflicts is temporary, so it is limited. At most he can only kill the body—there is no more that *he can* do—But there is One "who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell." Do we provoke the *Lord* to jealousy? Are we stronger than *he*! Hast thou an arm like *God*, or canst thou thunder with a voice like *his*? As sinners therefore, we lay entirely at his mercy, and he could easily and righteously have destroyed us, "and that without remedy." But he was not revengeful or im-

placable. He was not only willing to be pacified, but even devised means for the purpose—for by grace are we saved.

This pacification is to be viewed three ways: in the cross: in the gospel: and in the conscience. In the cross it is accomplished. Though God is good and merciful, he must maintain the honour of his law, defend his truth, and display the rectitude of his government. Hence he set forth his Son, "to be a propitiation—to declare his righteousness—that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Hence also we are told that Christ "made reconciliation for the sins of the people." His death was infinitely valuable, not only from his innocency, but his divinity; and was "an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour." Thus while sin is condemned it is pardoned; and God is glorified while we are redeemed. There is now no hindrance to a sinner's return on the part of God; and "we have boldness to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus." What do people mean when they talk of making their peace with God? If such peace can be made, it was made by the blood of the cross. If our tears, and confessions, and performances, could have accomplished the work, God would have spared his own Son an immensity of needless suffering. If without shedding of blood there is no remission, Christ has been sacrificed for us, or we are yet in our sins.

In the gospel it is revealed. In vain the work had been effected unless it had been made known. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: and whatever obscurity attaches to any other subject in the Scriptures, the light of life shines on this subject with peculiar lustre. The Peacemaker himself came and preached peace: and sent forth also his servants to publish it everywhere, and upon the housetops. The gospel ministry is called the ministry of reconciliation; that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: upon which ground, says the Apostle, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." How blind must that guide be, who does not show unto men this way of salvation! What a physician of no value is he who does not employ this balm of Gilead in the cure of souls!—By his stripes we are healed.

In the conscience it is realized. In vain is it not only procured but published, if it be rejected or disregarded. It must be applied by faith. Then we receive the atonement; rely upon it; plead it; and have access with confidence. By believing we enter into rest; and being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; not only peace above, but peace within. And it is a peace which passeth all understanding. For he is pacified perfectly, and for ever. Who can describe the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin? and who is able to say, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us?" God's frown darkens the universe: but when he smiles every thing rejoices. Eternity has no dread. Death has no sting. Affliction has no curse. "In that day," therefore, says the Church, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."

Nor is this experience unfriendly to holiness, and good works. Yea, it is necessary to them: and believers are witnesses of these things. The people of the world may think that their liberty is licentious; but they run in the way of his commandments when God hath enlarged their heart. The joy of the Lord, instead of weakening their motives to duty, is their strength. The comforts of the Holy Ghost, instead of being opiates, prove cordials, and give them life more abundantly. The promises cleanse them. Hope purifies them. What says the Apostle? "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" What says God in the words before us? "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done." The apprehension of wrath not only terrifies, but repels. We hate those we dread. We cannot love a Being while we view him as an enemy to our happiness.

Till I knew God as the God of peace, my heart could no more bleed than a stone. But when I saw his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, when I saw his abundant mercy, and the exceeding riches of his grace, not only in sparing me so long, but in being willing to receive me after all my offences; and especially in having, not only without my desert, but even desire, provided a Saviour in whom I have righteousness, and strength, and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places; and was enabled to realize the whole by faith—then the stone became flesh—then I cried, God be merciful to me a sinner—then I sorrowed after a godly sort. The prodigal could view the evil of his conduct in the misery to which it had reduced him; and he had some sense of his shame when he resolved to return and say, "I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants"—But he felt it a thousand times more when his father fell upon his neck and kissed him. O how did he repent and

condemn himself for having grieved such a parent! O how did he weep when they put on the best robe; and ushered him into the room of festivity prepared for the occasion—"Yes, tears of joy!"—Nay, but tears of ingenuous sorrow too!

MAY 8.

"*Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory.*"—Zech. vi. 13.

We need not ask, of whom speaketh the prophet, when the words immediately preceding tell us that he is "the man whose name is the BRANCH," who should "grow up out of his place"—"He," says Zechariah, "shall build the temple of the Lord"—And to fix our attention to it the more, he repeats the sentiment with a striking addition—"Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory." Let us observe the TEMPLE; the BUILDER; and the GLORY.

The TEMPLE means the church of God. The Scripture often holds it forth under this image. The allusion was peculiarly natural in a Jewish writer, considering the importance attached to the house of God in Jerusalem. The name is founded on three reasons.

First, consecration. A temple is a place appropriated to sacred uses: and the people of God are separated from the world, and dedicated to his service—"The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." This is done by his eternal purpose, and by effectual calling. The former is realized and discovered in the latter, when they who were his by choice become his by surrender, each of them saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And they should remember that all they have, and all they are, is now the Lord's; and that to take any thing pertaining to a temple is not only robbery but sacrilege. Let them think of this when they would use their time, their substance, or any of their talents as their own, regardless of the will of God. Holiness becomes God's house for ever; and therefore it becomes them. Our Saviour was offended because they made his Father's house a house of merchandise, and drove out the buyers and sellers, and hallowed it for holy purposes. And says Paul, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." How vile and dreadful was it in Manasseh to take the image of Baal and place it in the temple, opposite the mercy-seat, the very throne of the God of Israel! Beware of profane mixtures: "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Christians, maintain your sacredness. Keep yourselves pure from all filthiness of flesh as well as spirit. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Secondly, residence. A mansion is a dwelling for a nobleman, a palace for a king, a temple for a God—and the church is called the temple of the Lord, because he occupies it: "Ye are the temple of the living God;" as God hath said, "I dwell in them, and walk in them." He is everywhere essentially, and it would be well for us always to remember that God seeth us: but he is in his Church by a special presence; and in a way of grace, and influence, and operation. This at once secures and dignifies it: "I will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her." "This," says he, "is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." What are numbers, or fine buildings, or imposing ceremonies, to communion with the living God?

Thirdly, devotion. He is served and worshipped in them as a temple. And he receives homage and adoration nowhere else according to his own requisition; "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." His worship therefore is a reasonable service. The offerings presented to him are not gross, but spiritual sacrifices. They are prayers, and praise, and alms, and a broken heart, and a contrite spirit—and though all these are imperfect and defiled, they result from principle: they aim at the glory of God; and being offered through the Mediator, and with his much incense, they are accepted in the Beloved, and the worshipper has the testimony that he pleases God.

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people."

MAY 9.

"*Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory.*"—Zech. vi. 13.

We have seen the building, let us turn to the BUILDER, "Even *he* shall *build* the temple of the Lord." In another view he is the foundation; and the only foundation laid in Zion. No image can do him justice. The sacred writers therefore are reduced to three things—They strip images of all their imperfections, and apply them to him in their complete state—They ascribe to these images properties which they do not naturally possess: thus they speak of him as "a *living* stone;" for

> "Nature, to make his beauties known,
> Must mingle colours not her *own*."

And—They join several of these images together: thus he is not only the way, but the leader in it; not only the physician, but the

remedy itself: not only the master of the feast, but the provision too—not only the foundation, but the builder also.

But how is he the builder! He is the only one—"Neither is there salvation in any other." Yet are not Christians required to build? Does not Jude say, "Build up yourselves in your most holy faith?" But this is to remind us that we are not only subjects but instruments in this work. *He* does not believe and repent—*We* are the believers and the penitents. But he *makes* us such: he works in us to will and to do; and though we are the boughs that bear "the fruits of righteousness," "in me," says the Lord, "is thy fruit found; and therefore it is called "the fruit of the Spirit." Are not Christians required to build up others? Yes, says the Apostle, "edify one another;" and "seek to excel to the edifying of the Church." And of himself he says, "As a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon." But even ministers only build instrumentally. He employs them, and all their success is from him. Paul and Apollos are only ministers by whom we believe, even as the Lord gives to every man. They often begin too insensible of this, and are like Melancthon, who supposed, in his fervour, he should convert all who heard him: but they must learn—and cannot learn too soon, that it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. *He* builds this temple three ways.

First, He purchases all the materials. These consist of believers. Other temples are built of lifeless substances, but this of living stones: and he procures them, and with no less a price than his own blood: "He gave his life a ransom for many."

Secondly, he prepares them. The materials for building a common temple are not found fit, but made so: and Solomon probably in allusion to his own great undertaking, says, "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house. The wood must be felled, and come under the operation of the axe, the saw, and the plane. The stones must be dug out of the quarry, and hewn and polished: and we are commanded to "look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged"—that is, to remember our condition by nature. But he does not leave us where he finds us, or what he finds us. He renews us in the spirit of our minds, and forms us a people for himself, to show forth his praise.

Thirdly, He unites them. He assigns them their proper places; gives them one heart and one way; and by "faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus," they are bound more firmly together than any human ties could attach them—The union is for ever—And the Saviour addressing his Father, says, "They are one even as we are one."

The parts of a temple are different, but they are all necessary. The door cannot say to the window, or the wall to the roof, I have no need of thee. Some parts are more near, and some more remote, some more conspicuous, and some more concealed; but they all subserve their appointment: they have all a relation to each other: and by their junction form one whole—"We are all one in Christ Jesus"—"in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

Art thou found, O my soul, among those to whom the application can be made? "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

MAY 10.

"*Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory.*"—Zech. vi. 13.

It is supposed that a GLORY will result from the building; and to whom can this glory belong but to the builder? A man's works praise him in the gates. Some have immortalized themselves by military achievements; some by voyages of discovery: some by scientific improvements; some by the composition of a book; and some by the structure of an edifice—But what building ever redounded so much to the glory of the builder as this temple of the Lord? It would be easy to prove, or rather to exemplify this.

Observe the badness of the materials. The worse and the more unsuitable these are, the more praise is due to the workman that bends them completely to his purpose. But there never were such materials as this builder had to work upon: so that it was necessary to change, not their form only, but their very nature; and from earthly, sensual, and devilish, to make them heavenly and divine.

Then see the excellency of the workmanship—"His work is perfect." The more we examine an instance of human agency, the less admiration we feel. We can generally, by examination, soon perceive some superfluity or deficiency; some possibility of alteration for the better; or at least, we find the whole is within our grasp, and the extent of the art can be comprehended. But when we turn to the Lord's doing, this is marvellous in our eyes, in proportion as we explore it. By every research we seem to detect fresh indications of design; we feel ourselves always on the verge of infinite: we exclaim, "This is the finger of God." So it is with all his works—He doth *all* things well: but he hath magnified his word above all his name: and in the salvation of his people he excelleth in glory.

Look at the magnitude of the work. A work is sometimes estimated by the length of time employed in the execution of it. Forty and six years, said the Jews, was this temple in building: but here the structure has been going on for near six thousand years, and is far from being accomplished yet. A work is estimated by the number of workmen engaged, and the abundance of scaffolding required. Here millions of hands have been cordially employed, and countless multitudes also, who will derive no advantage from it. Scholars, merchants, kings, heroes, tyrants, have laboured for this cause, without knowing it: and the world itself, as soon as the work is finished, will be removed and burnt up. The estimate is also taken from the duration. Man's work, like himself, is perishing. Solomon's temple was burnt by the Chaldeans, and Zerubbabel's temple by the Romans; and not a fragment remained, a few ages only after their erection. But, says the Saviour, "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The defections of heretics, and the apostasies of professors, do not affect it: "the foundation of God standeth sure." The most remarkable structures for permanence are the pyramids of Egypt; but though it is probable they may reach the last day, they must then fall in the wreck of all things. But from the ruins of sin he has made his people an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations.

And how glorious to himself is the manner in which he carries it forward to its completion! Difficulties insuperable to man attend every part of the work. It is opposed by all the powers of darkness. But their attempts only serve to display the Saviour's wisdom and power. Nothing is too hard for him. He is not driven from his post, he is not compelled to pause. He will accomplish the plan precisely according to the design, and to a moment of the time appointed. The angels will not pass by the partially erected edifice and say, He began to build, but was not able to finish—"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of the house: his hands shall also finish it. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the head stone thereof with shouting—Grace, grace unto it!"

Such is the determination of God—"even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and—*he* shall bear the glory." Every thing in the economy of salvation therefore is so arranged, that he who glories must glory in the Lord. Therefore every sentiment incompatible with this, is an erroneous sentiment; and every disposition adverse to this, is an unrighteous disposition. And in the minds of his people, the proud looks *are* humbled, and the lofty looks laid low; and the Lord alone *is* exalted. They now readily exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy Name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake." How much more will this be the case, when he will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe!—when they will cast their crowns before the Throne; and it will be their business and their delight to exclaim, "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

"O may I bear some humble part
In that immortal song;
Wonder and joy shall tune my heart,
And love command my tongue."

MAY 11.

"*I have learned by experience.*"—Gen. xxx. 27.

THERE is no spiritual meaning in these words. They are only the language of Laban acknowledging the benefit he had derived under God—for even *he* could talk piously, from his son-in-law Jacob; "The Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." But the way in which he says he had learned this—"I have learned by experience," will apply to a Christian in speaking of his acquaintance with divine things; and afford us an occasion to notice a very interesting subject. Experiments are processes of trial to determine some thing not sufficiently known or admitted. Experience is the knowledge derived from the trial; and this knowledge is very distinguishable from mere report or opinion. A medicine is announced as a specific for some malady; but when I have taken it, and have been cured by it, I have learned the excellency and efficacy of it by experience. Much of the philosophy of former times was little better than learned affectation. The vouchers of it were not willing to own their ignorance, and place themselves upon a level with the vulgar, and so they conjectured and theorized; but their hypotheses could not abide the test. Of late years a wiser course, recommended by Bacon, has been pursued, and people have been taught to found science on fact, to reason from inductions, and to take nothing for truth without trial.

Now this is what we wish with regard to the noblest of all subjects. Why cannot religion be tried? Why cannot prophecy be compared with events? Why cannot miracles be examined by any given standard of evidence? Why cannot we take what the Scripture says of the state of human nature, and go into the world, and see whether it is borne out by history and observation? Yes, says the Christian, the wickedness and deceitfulness of the heart is not a notion with me—I have learned it by experience in my unthankfulness under mercies, incorrigibleness under corrections, unprofitableness un-

der vows and professions. I know that there is such a Saviour as the gospel proclaims, for I have made application to him, and I have proof of his ability, suitableness, and willingness to save in my own salvation—"He that believeth hath the witness in himself." The Word says, "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely," and I have learned this by experience. I have always suffered when I have turned aside to crooked and selfish policy; but I never had reason to repent when I have acted in simplicity and godly sincerity, and been willing to deny myself for the Lord's sake. In the same way I can attest the influence and usefulness of prayer—It has calmed my fears—it has revived me in the midst of trouble—I have learned by experience, that it is good for me to draw near to God.

And verily this is the best way in which we can become acquainted with divine truth. Our knowledge of it without this will be mere speculation. We read of "a form of knowledge" as well as "a form of godliness:" and what is the value of the one more than of the other, without "the power thereof!" The knowledge of some things is injurious rather than useful without it. When persons take up the sovereignty of God from a mere doctrinal system, we commonly find them heady, and contentious, and censorious: but when they learn it from experience, and are constrained to own that by his grace they are what they are, he having begun with them, instead of their beginning with him; it makes them humble, and grateful, and candid, and tender.

It is a good thing for the heart to be established with grace;" and this mode of learning confirms the judgment, and renders a man safe against error. He is not to be ridiculed or reasoned out of his conviction. In vain would any one tell you, If you have tasted them, that gall is not bitter, or honey sweet.

The heart also, as Solomon remarks, teacheth the lips, and we derive a great advantage from experience in dealing with others. We shall be able to speak with more confidence, and more earnestness, and more feeling; because we do not deal in untried advantages, but declare that which we have seen, and heard, and handled of the Word of life. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." It is thus we gain the tongue of the learned, and know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: it is thus we can comfort others with those comforts wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Christians therefore should study their experience. It is one of their best books; and as to some of them it has become now no inconsiderable volume. They should remember how differently things have frequently appeared in prospect, and in review. They should observe how differently they have felt and acted in various periods and conditions of life: especially they should examine what were the workings of their hearts under those afflictive dispensations which are called trials, because intended to be moral probations.

It is natural that Christians should communicate of their experience; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. But here wisdom is profitable to direct. We are not to give that which is holy to the dogs; neither should we cast our pearls before swine. In a general way it will be proper to follow the example of David, who said; "Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul"—They alone can understand and relish the communication. And with regard to them, we are not to speak without distinction. We are not to bring forward the deep things of God to those who cannot bear them now. Neither should we dismay the timid and doubting, by displaying before them our confidence and ecstasies. We may talk with some out of the eighth of the Romans, but with others we must quote out of the seventh. It will *often* be better to talk of divine things at large without referring to our *own* experience. And we must *always* remember that we had better never speak of our experience at all, unless it be accompanied with suitable practice: for it is always of the nature of personal evidence, and therefore will only affect the hearers in proportion as they confide in us.

MAY 12.

"*Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*"—Psalm xvii. 5.

Religion is principally an intercourse maintained between God and us. And in the thought of it there is something very wonderful and striking. When we consider his greatness and glory, and our vanity and vileness, we are led to exclaim, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" But so it is—And as he visits us, so he allows us to visit him—and while he addresses us, we address him. He addresses us in his Word, and we address him in prayer.

How much they lose who are strangers to this duty, this privilege! It is our light in darkness; our solace in affliction; our sanctification in prosperity. We cannot be wise, or happy, or even safe without it. Let me observe David's *course*, and his *concern* respecting it; and learn to pray as he prayed, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

First, his *course*. He speaks of his "goings." Religion does not allow a man to sit

still. Under the influence of it he believes, knows, feels, speaks: but all these are vain unless they result in practice—unless he is, so to speak, set a going—unless he says, with David, "I will walk in thy truth." To walk is to be active and advancing. It stands for the whole of our conduct: and upon this it is that the Scripture lays such stress, requiring us as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord so to walk in him; and to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.

He speaks of his goings "in God's paths." These are three-fold.—The path of his *commands*. "O let me not wander from thy commandments." "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight." His commands are to be found in his word; and faith in Christ is one of them, and necessary to our obeying all the rest; for "this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ."—The path of his *ordinances*. Pious minds alive to the authority of God who has appointed them, and believing the promise that they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, and feeling their need of spiritual supplies and succour, can never neglect the means of grace. They will value retirement for reading the Scriptures, and meditation, and prayer. They will love the conversation of the godly. As they have opportunity they will repair to the sanctuary, and join in the solemn assemblies in public devotion, and in hearing the word preached, and in surrounding the table of the Lord. Others may indeed occasionally or even frequently attend upon religious institutions, but not as spiritual worshippers who use them as mediums of communion with God, and channels of communication from him.—The path of his *dispensations*. Nothing in our condition happens by chance. Events are the movements of his providence: and where others disregard them or view them only in connexion with creatures—for God is not in all their thoughts, believers acknowledge him in their connexions, their losses, their gains, their comforts, and their trials. Thus Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And David says, "I will sing of mercy and of judgment; unto *thee*, O Lord, will I sing." Such was his course. Observe,

Secondly, his concern respecting it—"Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." It is the language of conviction. He knows the injury that would result from a fall or even a slip in religion—How it would dishonour God, cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, harden the wicked, scandalize the weak, distress the strong, injure his own usefulness and peace, and bring upon himself those trials by which his wickedness should correct him, and his backslidings reprove him. It is the language of apprehension. He knew his footsteps were prone to slide. How can a man be ignorant of this who reflects on the malice and power of his adversary the devil, and the allurements of the world, and the corruption of his nature; and has seen the errors and falls of others far superior to himself? It is well to be sensible of our danger; and it is only grace that can enable us to say—

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I *love*—"

It is the language of weakness. He knew not only his exposure, but his inability to help himself. This a Christian learns not only from faith in the testimony of the Word, which everywhere assures us that we are without strength in ourselves, but from experience also. He sees how little he can depend upon his persuasions however clear, and his resolutions however firm—How often have they given way, and filled him not only with grief but astonishment! Year after year has told him that he who trusts in his own heart is a fool; and that he is not wise who trusts in his own grace—It is not thy grace, says the Saviour, but *my* grace that is sufficient for thee. It is the language of confidence. He hopes in God while he renounces all self-dependence. The one is as necessary as the other. And it is as well founded. O that we could keep them equally balanced in the mind—That while we avoid presumption, we may also avoid despondency—That while we are humble we may also be cheerful—That while we are cautious we may also be courageous: knowing that while we cannot stand of ourselves, he is able to keep us from falling, and has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my keeper, I will not fear—Hold THOU me up, and I SHALL BE SAFE.

MAY 13.

"*Behold my hands and my feet.*"—Luke xxiv. 39.

His sufferings and death were not only wonderful, but all-important: and he showed them his hands and his feet;" because these contained the effects and proofs of them. The wounds were indeed now closed, and this was as miraculous as his resurrection itself: for the parts had been so lacerated and torn by the large nails that fastened him to the cross and sustained the whole weight of his body, that many weeks would have been required to heal them naturally. But the marks remained, and fully ascertained him to be the sufferer who died on the cross. All the disciples now present saw them; and Thomas who was absent saw them a few days after, and was no longer faithless, but believing. And these signs of his passion our Lord retained, not only after his resurrection, but also after his ascension. John, in his visions,

saw an image of him, "as a lamb that had been slain;" that is, the lamb appeared with the wool gored, and the neck gashed. He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and is our advocate with the Father, by presenting his humanity and pleading the sacrifice he offered on earth: for he entered into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood, the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel. The Father beholds his hands and his feet, and is well pleased for his righteousness' sake, and says, "Ask of me now, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." The angels behold them, and though he has not saved them, they know that he has saved us, and their benevolence leads them to exclaim, with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." The saints behold them, and sing "a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Christians, to this same sight you are hastening; for yet a little while, and you will be like him, for you shall see him as he is. But you have no reason to look for such a real and sensible sight of him here. Some indeed seem persuaded that they have actually seen him; but their mistake obviously appears from the manner of the sight. He could render himself corporeally visible; but if he did this, he would give us a true representation of himself. These good people have always seen him upon the cross: but he is now in his glory. If he showed himself at this moment, we should not see his hands and feet bleeding; but his body would be a glorious body, as Saul of Tarsus saw it, and shining above the brightness of the sun. The case seems to be this. These persons, of lively apprehensions and feeling, in the depth of their anguish and terror, obtained relief from a dying Saviour, by believing, which is mental sight, and took the impression of faith for a sensible reality.

But there is still a spiritual exhibition of himself, in which he says, "Behold my hands and my feet." They are to be seen, First, in the Scripture of Truth; in its types, prophecies, history, doctrine. Secondly, in the ministry of the Gospel, which is called "the preaching of the cross." Thirdly, in the teachings of the Holy Ghost, who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to us; so that we see the Son and believe on him. And, Fourthly, in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, where, by emblems and memorials the most simple and significant, before our eyes, Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified among us.

And what should the sight remind us of? Beholding his hands and his feet, we should think of the evil of sin, that required his suffering and death to put it away—And of the justice of God, that spared not his own Son when he became a surety for us—And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his kindness towards us. We hear of benefactors: but how rarely do they exercise self-denial, or make personal and painful sacrifices! We talk of love; and greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. But while we were enemies Christ died for us—

MAY 14.

"*And the Lord showed me four carpenters.*"
Zech. i. 20.

"THE heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." And it is given them not only to possess and enjoy, but to cultivate. Carelessness, and ignorance, and sloth, stalk over many rude and barren spots, which skill and diligence could render beautiful and productive. It is the same with the Scripture. Many passages as they are now read seem to have no meaning, and yield no information, yet they really contain much of the wisdom that is from above. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; but they are addressed to us as rational creatures, and we are commanded to search them. We must therefore not only read them, but remark, and examine, and compare, and apply them. And if we do this with seriousness and prayer, we shall be amply rewarded for our endeavours, and the good ground will yield "some an hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Zechariah had seen four horns, and had said to the angel that talked with him, "What be these?" And he answered him, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." Then THE LORD SHOWED HIM FOUR CARPENTERS. And upon his inquiring, "What come these to do?" he received for answer, "These are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it."

It is not perhaps possible to determine who those "four horns" were, or whether they are to be viewed as so many individuals or nations—they were evidently hostile powers. The same may be said of these "four carpenters." Some have supposed they were Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and Nehemiah, and Ezra. In each case a definite number seems to be used for an indefinite.

But we see from it—that the friends of Zion are as numerous as her foes; that her defence is equal to her danger; and that as the state of his people requires it, the Lord will seasonably raise up means and instruments for their succour and deliverance—This is the doctrine of the text. And the assurance may be derived from four principles—The love of God—The power of God—The faithfulness of God—The conduct of God. In the first we see that he must be inclined to appear for them, as they are infinitely dear to him. In the second we see that he is able to do it. In the third, that he is engaged to do it, and his promise cannot be broken. In the fourth, that he always has done it, Scripture, history, and experience being witness—

"Then let the world forbear their rage,
The Church renounce her fear;
Israel must live through every age,
And be the Almighty's care."

MAY 15.

"*And she said, Oh! my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.*"—1 Sam. i. 26, 27.

HERE we see the meekness of wisdom, and the wisdom of meekness. Hannah does not bring the former scene to the remembrance of Eli by his improper carriage towards her—"O my lord, I am the woman you called a drunkard, and treated as a daughter of Belial. What do you think of her now? And what do you think of yourself and your false, vile, and cruel censure?" Little minds always retain a sense of an injury received: but it is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression; and we are not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good. We question the sincerity of a man who says, I forgive but I do not forget. We are sure he does not resemble the Father of mercies, who says, Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Good men are not to be upbraided with their miscarriages and mistakes. They have long ago mourned over them; and have condemned them more than others have done—Let them be buried in oblivion for ever.

Here we behold one of those transitions which often take place in human life. We may compare it with another affecting change of a very different quality, and which also befell a pious woman. When Naomi returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth from the country of Moab, to which she had been driven by famine, and had reached her native village, the people of Bethlehem came around her, saying, "Is this Naomi?" And she said, "Call me not Naomi—Call me Mara, for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me. I had substance—I am now poor. I had a husband—I am now a widow. I was a mother—I am now childless. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" But what a difference is there between Hannah's former and present circumstances and experience. Then she was a petitioner—now she is filled with thanksgiving, and has the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Then she presented herself at the temple in the bitterness of her soul; then she sowed in tears—now she reaps in joy; then she went forth weeping, bearing precious seed—now she returns again with rejoicing, bringing her sheaf with her. "Oh my lord, you may have forgotten the case, but *I* have not. I who am now so favoured and honoured am the very woman who was here at such a time, drunk indeed with grief; but he has made darkness light before me: he has turned the shadow of death into the morning—Oh my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here praying unto the Lord."

Here we learn the importance of prayer. Whoever undervalues it, says Hannah, I can extol and recommend it. I have found it good to draw near to God—For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Time employed in prayer is not spent in vain. Prayer is the richest traffic in the world; the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. By intercourse with God we are impressed, and made to resemble him, as the face of Moses shone when he came down from the communion of Horeb. How are we refreshed by the exercise when our spirits are weary and ready to faint! How it enables us to leave our fears and cares at the footstool of divine grace; and go away as Hannah did, with our countenance no more sad, and our heart feeling the peace of God which passeth all understanding! Trouble is the dreary path which in this vale of tears all will sooner or later tread: and to enter without a guide; to go on without a comforter, to meet death at the end without support or hope—if any man be reduced to this, "I say, an untimely birth is better than he." But let us not limit the subject, or suppose with some that the worth or usefulness of prayer arises wholly and merely from the influence of the performance. The labour of the husbandman in the field is beneficial to him by the exercise, and conduces to health and strength: but he looks also for a crop; and goes forth and sees first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. So it is with us. The very action of prayer benefits and improves us: but if there be any meaning in the Scripture, we may rely upon answers of prayer. This woman obtained her request

and the time would fail us to tell of all those recorded in the word of God who could acknowledge that he had given them the blessings which they asked of him.

Hannah observes the answer to her petition. Prayer is sometimes answered immediately, and sometimes it is delayed. It is sometimes answered in the very thing desired, and sometimes in a way of exchange—while sometimes, by strange and even terrible things in righteousness, the Lord answers his people. Wisdom therefore is here necessary in discerning, and caution in judging. We should not indeed subtilize too much; nor be distressed if we cannot ascertain what *is* in answer to prayer. We have always enough to encourage us to continue in the exercise, and should impress our minds with the conviction that our seeking cannot be in vain in the Lord. Yet as prayer *is* answered, it is proper and important to attend to it; and whoso is wise and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. It is more than trifling with the Supreme Being, it is even insulting him, to awaken his attention when we never mean to regard his benefits. Yet thousands never think more of their prayers when they have once offered them. They knock, but never stay to see whether the door of mercy is opened. They send an address, but never wait for the reply, or read it when it comes. And will God remember prayers which we ourselves forget, or regard prayers which we ourselves despise? On the other hand, how desirable is it to know that he has not forgotten to be gracious, or turned away our prayer from him! How confirming is it to our confidence to be able to say, with Moses, "The Lord heard me at that time also." What excitement to praise and prayer does David derive from this persuasion; "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications."

Hannah not only observes the regard of God to her case, but acknowledges it. So should we. We should not hide his righteousness within our heart; but declare his faithfulness and his salvation. Many stand in need of encouragement, and under a sense of their unworthiness and guilt are ready to conclude that the Lord will not hear them. Be his witnesses. Testify to them from your own experience. I have tried the freeness and fullness of his grace. I never trusted in him and was confounded, never sought him and was disappointed. Tell it to his own people. It will not excite their envy; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. They have prayed for you: call upon them to aid your praise: O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. Yea, like Hannah, tell it to Eli—Ministers personally need such communications; and they can also improve them for the good of others, both in their private intercourse and in their public services.

What a place will heaven be when we ascend to that Shiloh! What developments shall we have to make from our history and experience! What answers of prayer, what deliverances, what blessings to acknowledge! What mutual congratulations shall we have to receive! What praises shall we have to offer!

MAY 16.

"*Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.*"—1 Sam. i. 28.

This must have been an exercise of great self-denial in Hannah, to resign so dear a child for ever. But it was only an act of fidelity to religious engagement: it was the condition of her prayer: she vowed a vow, and said, "O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." Distress will often gender purposes and resolutions, because we then feel our weakness and dependence; but when the danger is removed, or the blessing obtained, and the hour of performance is arrived, we resemble the lepers who, when healed, returned not to give glory to God. How many have howled upon their beds, and poured out a prayer when God's chastening hand was upon them! But the vows of sickness have been violated by renewed health, and their iniquities, like the wind, have taken them away. Even Hezekiah, affected as he was by the divine goodness, so that he composed a writing to fix and perpetuate the sentiment, and said, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth: The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord:" yet after all this he rendered not according to the benefit done him. So it was with Jacob. When, going from home a forlorn youth, he was indulged with the vision at Bethel, and alluding to the divine intimation so suited to his circumstances of distress, he "vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be

God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Yet when he returned, multiplied and enriched, he passed year after year, comparatively in the neighbourhood, forgetful of his engagement, till God said to him, "Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." Then, and not till then, "Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

We do not much recommend vowing; we would rather urge praying: but if vows are to be made, let them be made in the strength of divine grace; and let them not be trifled with, but fulfilled. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." How noble was the conduct of David upon his deliverance! "I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings: I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble." In the same manner Hannah acts when she brings her little Samuel to Shiloh, and dedicates him to the Lord—"As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord"—

And was she a loser by this surrender? Did he cease to be hers because he was the Lord's? She would feel a new and a peculiar interest in him, in consequence of his relation to the sanctuary. There she knew the little Levite would be safe, and happy, and dignified. There he would grow up to be the light of Israel, the prophet, the ruler, the judge of his country. And she would make him a little coat, and bring it to him year by year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And while her fingers were employed in the needlework, her spirit would hold communion with him; and she would look forward to a state in which she would possess him for ever—

Was she a loser by this resignation? Immediately her tongue was loosed, and became as the pen of a ready writer: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation." There is nothing meritorious in our performances; but with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Them that honour me, says God, I will honour. When we follow our convictions, and show that we hold nothing too dear to part with at his call, he gives us the testimony of his approbation, and fills the mind with peace and joy. When the Eunuch was baptized, he went on his way rejoicing. What is the reason that some are strangers to the liberty and comfort of the Gospel? Is it not, some known duty neglected? or some idol adored? Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there no secret thing with thee? Throw the head of the traitor to our Lord the King over the wall; and Joab retires, and peace is restored—O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.

Was she a loser by this sacrifice? "And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters." For one child given, behold five added! "And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." "Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

MAY 17.

"*The son of consolation.*"—Acts iv 36.

This is spoken of a man who was a Levite. His ancestors had retired from Judea to the country of Cyprus. We know not for what purpose; but there he was born. His first name was Joses. But after his conversion to Christianity he was surnamed by the Apostles Barnabas, which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation. Two reasons have been assigned for this denomination; both very consistent with each other, and both very probable in themselves. First, because by his property—for he had substance, he succoured and solaced the poor and miserable. And Secondly, because by his preaching he comforted the people of God, and encouraged sinners to come to the Saviour for deliverance. Ministers may differ considerably from each other. Some may be called Boanerges, or sons of thunder, not only as they are bold in their manner, but as the severe seems to be their element, and they deal much in the alarming. Others are Barnabases; and have given them, the tongue of the learned, that they may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Let us not oppose the servants of Christ to each other, thereby inflating one, and running down another, because of their diversities. Let us view them all in their commission, and their suitableness to their appointments. Their stations, their

natural dispositions, their gifts, their graces are not the same: but we need them all; and they are all useful. Let one plant, and another water; let one lay the foundation, and another build thereon; let one be set for the defence of the gospel, and another abound in the application of it; each is alike respectable; and each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. Beware, says the Apostle, in his address to the Corinthians, that you fall not into spiritual babyism; or walk as men. "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" To him let us look, and say, not formally, but sincerely, "Lord, send by whom thou wilt send." If we attempt to make the favourite a substitute "in God's stead," we shall provoke the Most High to remove him, or to withhold his blessing by him; thereby to reprove our idolatry; and to convince us that he will not give his glory to another. Happy they whose strength is in Him! They are most likely to succeed, both in hearing and in preaching, who are most imbued with the conviction; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

MAY 18.

"*Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*"—1 Cor. i. 30.

Here are four articles. The first is wisdom—He is made of God unto us wisdom. He is the true excellency of the understanding. In knowing him, we know all that is necessary to be known. Especially we know God—No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who was in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. He is the author of our spiritual illumination; he is the prophet of his church, and leads us into all truth by his word and Spirit. As the sun can only be seen by his own rays, so he is only known by his own revealing. He therefore says, "I will manifest myself unto him." The second is righteousness—He is made of God unto us righteousness. That is, he delivers us from guilt and condemnation, and makes us just before God. The Apostle tells us how it is accomplished: he hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. This righteousness, derived entirely from himself, regardless of our worthiness or works, is called the righteousness which is of faith, because it is only apprehended, and made ours, and pleaded by faith. The third is sanctification—He is made of God unto us sanctification. This is as much from him as righteousness, only not in the same way. He is the one to us by imputation, he is the other by communication. By the one he changes our state, by the other our nature. By the one he entitles us to life, by the other he makes us meet for it. But though the blessings are distinguishable, they are not separable. He came by water, and by blood. Whom he justifies he renews. And this sanctification is more than a reformation of manners, or mere morality. A man may be moral without being sanctified, but he cannot be sanctified without being moral. When he sanctifies us he puts a new spirit within us, delivers us from the dominion and the love of every sin, and enables us not only to obey God, but to delight to do his will, and to dedicate all we have to his service and glory. The fourth is redemption—He is made of God unto us redemption. To ascertain the meaning of which, we must observe that it is distinguished from the foregoing benefits. But if it were taken for redemption from the curse of the law, it would coincide with his being our righteousness, and if for emancipation from the servitude of sin, it would be comprised in his being our sanctification. It is also mentioned *after* wisdom, righteousness and sanctification. To which we may add an appeal to other passages of Scripture where the same term is used. Thus Paul says to the Ephesians, Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the *day of redemption.* And to the Romans, We groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, *the redemption of the body.* Here the import of the term must mean the resurrection to eternal life. And there is a peculiar propriety in applying the word to this conclusion of the Christian's recovery from the effects of the Fall, not only because any great deliverance, regardless of price, is called redemption in the Scripture, but also because it is the effect of the purchase of the cross. Christ has ransomed the bodies as well as the souls of his people, and therefore God's covenant also is with their dust. Their bodies will not only be raised, but infinitely improved, and will bear not the image of the earthly but of the heavenly Adam. The sacred writers therefore, in speaking of the happiness of believers, go forward at once to the glory of the last day—not to the denying or undervaluing of an intermediate state, but because their salvation will then, and not till then, be perfectly achieved. This consummation is all his own work and honour—"To them that look for him will he appear a second time without sin unto *salvation.*" "We look for *the Saviour* the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

And is he made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?—Then we learn what is our condition by nature: we are destitute of all these.

and can never derive them from ourselves.—Then we see the importance and value of the Lord Jesus. He is not something only, but every thing to them that are lost. In him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings.—Then we need not wonder that he is the substance of revelation, and that the Scriptures everywhere should testify of him.—Then he should be the theme, the only theme of preaching; and every minister, faithful to his commission or usefulness, like Paul, should determine not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.—Then we may judge of the happiness of Christians who can realize him in all these glorious blessings as their own; and infer, how resigned, and glad of heart, and thankful they should always live.—And what says the subject to those who despise or neglect him? What do they lose! What will be their doom! How intolerable! How unavoidable! And yet how righteous!

Let me therefore be wise enough to choose this good part, and seek after an interest in him. If ever I am saved, he must be all my salvation—May he be all my desire. May a union with him be not only my supreme, but immediate concern—knowing that the gracious opportunity afforded me is short and uncertain, and—that I cannot be happy too soon. He who has the Son has life; and is prepared for every thing!

MAY 19.

"*Noah walked with God.*"—Gen. vi. 9.

The same thing is testified of Enoch; and will be exemplified in every partaker of divine grace. Two questions may be asked concerning it: the one regards the nature, and the other the excellency, of this walk.

Now as to the former of these, walking with God includes the following things. It supposes that we are on terms of *concord and friendship*—"How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Here we see the necessity of a mediator. By the Fall we had revolted from God, and our access to him was cut off. But Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. He made peace by the blood of his cross; and we are accepted in the Beloved. But it is not enough that God is thus reconciled to us; we must also be reconciled to God; reconciled to his nature, to his law, to his gospel, to his government. As sinners we have no sentiments of affection, gratitude, or obedience towards God, but feel a spirit of enmity against him—How then can we walk with him, till this alienation and aversion be subdued? This change is effected by the Holy Spirit. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and then our desire is to his name. What we dreaded to part with before, we then resign with ease: and what was once irksome in the performance, becomes delightful. His commands are not grievous; his yoke is easy, and his ways pleasantness and peace.—It also implies *nearness*. If you walk with any one, he must be with you. God is not far from any one of us: he is about our path and our bed, and is acquainted with all our ways. And as God is present with us, so we are present with him—"I am continually with thee." By faith and reflection we bring ourselves consciously under his eye; feel, wherever we are, Hagar's impression, "Thou God seest me;" and upon every temptation to sin, however secret, say with Job, "Doth not he know my ways, and count all my steps?"—It also takes in *communion*. We do not walk with God as a madman with his keeper, or a servant behind his master, or as a stranger in the distance of reserve. God is our father and our friend; and when we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. Many a conference passes between us. Sometimes he begins. He addresses the soul, and the soul replies—"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." At other times we begin. We have much to divulge and much to implore. And we are allowed to deal freely and familiarly with him; yea, we are required in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make known our requests unto God.—It also expresses *mutual* progress in *the same direction*. When we walk with another, we recede and advance together; we move towards the same place or object. When therefore we walk with God, we pursue the same end with himself. And what is this end, but his own glory? This is his aim, in all his works, and in all his dispensations. And the Christian has the same bias and the same movement; and whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God. Hence one moral maxim serves as a short and sufficient rule to govern his conduct—He will follow wherever the Lord goes, for he cannot lead him astray: but he will not be found where the Lord refuses to accompany him, or he cannot consistently invite his presence to go with him. Let us pass from the nature to the excellency of this course.

In walking with God there is honour. It is the dignity of man, that he alone of all creatures in this world, is capable of it: but the Christian only actually enjoys it. In consequence of this, the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. He is raised up from the dust and the dunghill, and placed, not only among princes, but in company with God himself. How would the poor deem themselves honoured if permitted to walk at liberty with their sovereign! But such honour have all the saints—They walk with the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

In walking with God there is safety. Woe unto us, if our adversaries find us away from him, for without him we can do nothing. But what confidence and courage should not his presence inspire! He is not only for me, but with me; he is at my right hand, therefore I shall not be moved. If the enemy assails me, it is in sight of my almighty helper. Yea, if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for he is with me. When I first fled to him breathless, from a thousand dangers at my heels, he said to me, as David to Ahimelech: "Abide with me, for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard."

There is pleasure in walking with God. For with him is the fountain of life, and in his light we shall see light. If the journey would prove discouraging, our intercourse with him relieves the tediousness of the road, prevents weariness, revives our droopings, and renews our strength. With him we can dispense with things, the loss of which would otherwise destroy all our peace and comfort. When the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine, we can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation. In all our personal and relative trials, his presence opens a retreat; and we enter where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

There is profit in walking with God. Where is the believer who cannot acknowledge, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God?" The mind is powerfully affected by the objects with which we are very familiar. He who is much engaged in ignoble pursuits will soon be debased: but we are elevated in the presence and contemplation of greatness and sublimity. The things of earth tend to sensualize us; but when we are with God, the inroads of the world are checked; we stand on holy ground; impure desires and vain thoughts fall off. Our attention is fixed upon the perfections and blessedness of Jehovah, and we admire, and adore, and love, and resemble him. We feel the transforming views of his character, and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. People take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus; and our profiting appears unto all men. And as the nearer the fountain the purer the stream, and the nearer the centre the more powerful the attraction; so, the nearer we are to God the more will all our religious principles be influenced, the more we shall grow in grace, the more will our conversation be in heaven.

Let us not then sacrifice our highest welfare in disregarding this attainment. The vessels of mercy are afore prepared unto glory. We *must* be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. What would many find heaven, if they were admitted into it, but a melancholy and miserable state? Could *they* enjoy the perpetual presence of God who cannot endure even the occasional thought of him? How wise as well as merciful is the scheme of God in the Gospel! He never advances us without making us capable of the promotion! A king may elevate a slave to a superior station, but he cannot give him the suitableness and sufficiency for it. But God, when he changes our condition, changes our nature too. Before he brings us to heaven, he makes us heavenly: he draws forth our desires after it, and enables us to delight in the elements and beginnings of it—We walk with him in a way of grace, in token of, and in preparation for, our walking with him in glory; according to the promise, "THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE, FOR THEY ARE WORTHY."

MAY 20.

"*There standeth one among you, whom ye know not.*"—John i. 26.

THIS was the language of John at Bethabara beyond Jordan, where he was baptizing. It was addressed to many of the Jews who were assembled before him, among whom were Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, sent to inquire who he was. After disclaiming that *he* was any thing more than "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," he intimates the arrival of a personage on the spot, very superior to himself, and for whom he was unworthy to perform an office the most menial—"There standeth one among you, whom ye know not."

It is needless to mention who this wonderful Being was—But we see that our Lord had nothing in his outward appearance to distinguish him from others. As to his character, he was fairer than the children of men, and altogether lovely: but he was "clothed in a body like our own;" and "in all things" was "made like unto his brethren." Had we passed him upon the road, we should have taken him for a common man. No rays of glory encircled his head. No surprising beauty marked his features—"His face was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men." Least of all would he have been distinguished by a particular garb. His coat was indeed seamless, woven from the top throughout; but this was no observable thing. Wisdom is an enemy to affectation and eccentricity; and real greatness is never anxious for show, being satisfied with the consciousness of its own claims without the acknowledgments of others.

There is much excellency in the world that is unknown. In nature there is many a rich vein of ore concealed beneath a rude surface; and many a flower that blooms unseen in the woods, and sheds its fragrance

"on the desert air." Learning and genius are often buried in obscurity. The same may be said of moral and religious qualities. We are not to measure or number the instances of godliness by our personal observation. God has his hidden ones. Who has not been surprised as well as delighted in travelling to discover frequently individuals walking in the truth in situations the most unlikely and unpromising? Abraham said of Gerar, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place;" but he found it there. Elias said, "I am left alone;" but there were "seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." "Who," says the Church, "has begotten me these?" "These, where have they been?"

From hence Christians need not wonder at the little notice frequently taken of them. They are princes, but in disguise. The day of their manifestation is coming; and then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. But now they are seen poor, and afflicted, and despised; and little do the multitude imagine that they are heirs of God; the charge of angels; the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof; the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. And herein the members are only conformable to the head. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not"—"Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

There are many, we have reason to fear, who are in the same condition with John's attendants. Jesus is "among" them. And he is "standing" among them—a posture of attention—and a posture of readiness to depart. But they "know" him "not." They read of him, and hear of him; but they do not "see the Son, and believe on him." They are not spiritually and savingly acquainted with him. If they were, they would put their trust in him; they would love him: they would obey him; they would count all things but loss for the excellency of his knowledge; and be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. Now this ignorance is very deplorable; and the reason is because of the unspeakable importance of the object. We may be ignorant of many things, and yet be safe and happy: but to be ignorant of Christ is as if the pursued manslayer of old had been ignorant of the city of refuge; or as if a dying patient was ignorant of the only remedy that could cure him—People *perish* for lack of *this* knowledge. It is also criminal. Hence Paul says to those who are destitute of this knowledge, "I speak this to your shame." Their ignorance could only be their shame, as it was their sin; and it could not have been their sin unless it had been avoidable. The knowledge therefore is attainable. Happy they who possess it, and can say, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ; this is the true God, and eternal life. But why should any despair? The blind man could not open his own eyes: but the Saviour was passing by; and he cried, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me;" and "straightway he received sight, and followed him in the way." You must be taught of God; and it is the Spirit alone that can guide you into all truth. But "if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

MAY 21.

"*And from thence we came to Philippi.*"
Acts xvi. 12.

"I SAY unto you, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Nothing can more powerfully imply, or express the importance of conversion, than this declaration of the Saviour, the faithful and true witness. However lightly or contemptuously conversion may be thought of among men, celestial beings, proverbial for their wisdom, and incapable of mistake, always behold it with wonder and delight. With them, the improvements of art, the discoveries of philosophy, the exploits of heroes, the revolutions of empires, are comparatively nothing to the salvation of a soul. In their view, the release of Israel from the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, and their march through the wilderness to the land of Canaan, was a sight far less glorious and impressive, than the deliverance of a sinner from the power of darkness, and his translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son. At the first creation, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy: but they sing a new song, and with peculiar rapture, at the second, when old things pass away, and all things become morally and spiritually true.

Luke the historian was like-minded. He here speaks of his coming with Paul and Silas to Philippi. Philippi was built by Philip, the father of Alexander. From the beginning it had been noted: but within comparatively a recent period it had been rendered exceedingly remarkable, by the two great battles which the Romans fought in its plains. In the one Julius Cæsar vanquished Pompey. In the other Octavius Augustus defeated Brutus and Cassius. Though every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, and produces so much misery, it is painful to think what a power it has always had to excite and interest the attention. What traveller that has passed through

Waterloo has been able to forbear speaking of the 16th of June! But Luke says nothing of the work of Philip, of the prowess of Cæsar, of the fortune of Augustus!—But he mentions what would immortalize the place in the annals of the soul and eternity—The conversions of two individuals—Lydia and the jailer. Lydia was amiable and moral; a proselyte to the Jewish religion; and a worshipper of the true God. The jailer was a heathen; an idolater; vicious in his disposition; as rude and savage in his soul as in his office. The conversion of the one was in answer to prayer, gentle, gradual, imperceptible in the progress, but obvious in its result. The conversion of the other was sudden, extraordinary in the circumstances, and accompanied with terror and anguish. She was overcome by the smiles of mercy, and drawn by the cords of love. He, with the arrows of the Almighty sticking fast in him, and with a wounded spirit which he could not bear, was dragged to the judgment-seat, looking only for the sentence of condemnation. Her heart the Lord opened, as the sun opens a flower in spring. His heart was stormed like a citadel, where the strong man armed kept his palace and his goods in peace.

Hence we see by what various methods divine grace operates upon different persons; and learn how improper it is to lay down any one of them as a rule from which there is no exception. Let us not judge of the reality of the religion of others by an invariable standard; or draw a conclusion against ourselves, that we are strangers to a work of grace, because we have not been led in the same way with others. The Saviour may come in the bosom of the storm: but his presence and agency are no less real, in the still small voice. Samuel was called by grace as well as Manasseh: and Watts was saved by grace as well as Bunyan. "There are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations: but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

The surest and best way to judge is not by the manner in which the change has been accomplished, but by the effects produced and remaining. And happy they who are able, whatever that is curious or minute may perplex them, to say, One thing I know, that whereas I was blind I now see; whereas I was once dead I am now alive.

MAY 22.

"He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."—Micah v. 4.

If it be asked, of whom speaketh the prophet this? the words immediately preceding will furnish an answer; for they announce the birth of our Saviour in Bethlehem, and call him the ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting. Micah refers to him under the implied character of the Shepherd of his people, and expresses his work—

He shall "*feed.*" The term is not to be confined to his furnishing his flock with food; but to be taken as including the discharge of the pastoral office in all its parts—his causing them to rest—his leading them—his restoring them when they go astray—his healing them when wounded or sick—his defending and securing them. But observe the *manner* in which he is to perform his work.

He is to do it diligently and attentively—He shall *stand* and feed. We read of shepherds who lie down, loving to slumber. And even the most dutiful and sedulous shepherd sometimes unbends; he must have his moments and hours of relaxation and repose, during which his vigilance is suspended. But Jesus is always in a posture of observance and care; his sheep graze or repose beneath his look; he withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

He is to do it ably and powerfully—He shall feed in the *strength* of the Lord. On earth he had power to forgive sins, and heal all manner of diseases, and call by his word whom he would, and they came unto him. He said to Zaccheus in the tree, Make haste and come down; and to Matthew at the receipt of custom, Follow me; and immediately they obeyed him. Has he less power, now he is in heaven? He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. It is their happiness to know that they are under the charge of one who is mighty to save; able to save unto the uttermost. Their weakness requires this; their condition requires it. They are surrounded with enemies. Many of them are visible; but if our eyes were opened to see the invisible, we should be convinced that we could not be for an instant safe but as we are kept by the power of God. David, reminded of his inequality to the foe he was willing to fight, said unto Saul; "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." And what said the Saviour? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." His people do not always apprehend this; their fears are often great because their faith is small; and they draw the conclusion that they shall one day perish. At other times they can realize it; and then they feel secure, though in the

midst of danger, and can say with Paul—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

He is to do it with grace and dignity—He shall feed in the *majesty* of the name of the Lord his God. It does not refer to a temporal and worldly majesty. This he did not possess. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger. He was a man of sorrows. He was crucified as a slave and a malefactor. Thus he had no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire him. Yet even then there were those who beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. One of these could say, "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty"—He refers peculiarly to his transfiguration, when his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became white and glistering, and Moses and Elias appeared in glory talking with him, and a voice from heaven cried, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him. Compared with this, how poor, how mean is the pomp of a king on the most splendid of his court days! *His* kingdom was not of this world.

Action is graceful when art is concealed, and ease and nature seem only to appear. Longinus admires as an example of the sublime, the sentence, "Let there be light, and there was light:" and nothing can be more striking than the immensity of the effect joined to the simplicity of the cause. How far was Jesus from parade and effort in all his miracles! With what facility did he accomplish his mighty works—yet with what amazing gentleness and tenderness too!

Majesty is here connected with strength. Power is not always dignified in the possession or the display. Some, conscious of their force, are concerned for nothing else. They only think of coercion: they delight to intimidate: they would rather be feared than loved. These are vulgar and base spirits. Paul speaks of the excellency of the power which is of God. And had not Jesus this very power? How mildly, how kindly he exerted himself! He came down like rain upon the mown grass. He broke not the bruised reed; nor quenched the smoking flax. He paused to hear the cry of a beggar by the way-side, and commanded him to be brought to him. He raised the widow's son, and presented him to his mother. Grace was poured into his lips. Oh! to have heard the tone with which he said, "Woman, thy sins are forgiven thee"—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes, the world might have seen that Deity was come down in the likeness of men. What *could* be before them but the image of the invisible God!

But "with God is terrible majesty." This always Jesus displayed. His day is called the day of vengeance of our God: the great and terrible day of the Lord. Who, asks Malachi, shall abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth! He detected hypocrisy. He separated between the righteous and the wicked. He denounced Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, because they repented not. He doomed Jerusalem to war and desolation, because she knew not the day of her visitation. And never will he fail to show that he is not to be insulted, or even neglected with impunity. He is holy as well as patient; just as well as merciful. Nothing is represented so dreadful as the wrath of the Lamb: "For the great day of *his* wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand!"

MAY 23.

"*Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.*"—Isaiah lvii. 19.

HERE is the proclamation of the Gospel—Peace, peace. From this lovely word the Gospel derives its name and its character: it is called "the Gospel of Peace." Peace is sometimes used in the Scripture for well-being, or happiness at large: but here it is to be taken in its most appropriate signification, as holding forth the idea of reconciliation. Reconciliation with whom? With God, through the mediation of him who loved us, and gave himself for us—"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." We had offended and provoked him, and he could righteously have destroyed us: we had no claims upon his pity; and had we been told that he was forming a purpose concerning us, and was about to send a special messenger, yea, even his own Son, into the revolted province, what would have been the forebodings of our guilty consciences! "But God sent not his own Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him should be saved." And it is not the language of vengeance we hear from his messengers, War, war!—but "Peace, peace!" He does not wait for our repentance and submission, but of his own will he forms and accomplishes the plan. There were difficulties in the way of our restoration to his favour; these he removes: a sacrifice was necessary; this he provides—He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all. He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And thus having opened a new and living way into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, he arrays himself as the God of love, and comes and invites us to return. We were hid among the trees of the garden, whither fear had urged us, and the voice of thunder would have driven us further in; but the small still voice of pardon assuring us

that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plenteous redemption, draws us forth to his feet, and we are accepted in the Beloved.

Too well we know, from observation and experience, the evils of war. Who has not felt the wretchedness of discord? Who has not tasted the bitterness of alienation? And who has not relished the luxury of restored sentiments of kindness, tenderness, and friendship?—Let *him* judge of the joy and peace of believing! Yet what is peace with a brother, a friend, a father, a king, compared with peace with God! In his favour is life. Who can describe or imagine the calm after such a storm! It is a peace which passeth all understanding. It is angels' food—It is more. They never felt a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation. They never knew a wounded spirit and the anguish of despair, upon which descended, with healing under its wings, a hope full of immortality. But the Christian, throwing the arm of faith around the cross, can say "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."

But to whom is it addressed? "Peace, peace to *him that is far off, and to him that is near.*" This immediately regards the Gentiles and the Jews, as we are assured by the Apostle, who, speaking expressly of these parties, says, "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." The Jews were a people nigh unto him, not as to his essential presence, but his special and gracious. He resided among them; they had his oracles, his house, his ordinances, his servants. The Gentiles were far off, because they were strangers to all these privileges, and without God in the world. But Christianity knows no outward distinctions; it regards men as creatures in the same fallen condition, and brings them health and cure. "The Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

By a parity of reasoning, this distinction will include other classes. They who are far off, and they that are nigh, represent persons possessing certain privileges, or destitute of them. Some are nigh—That is, they were born of godly parents; they were piously educated: from children they have known the Holy Scriptures. Others are far off—That is, they are the children of irreligious parents, who teach them to swear, but not to pray; and lead them into sin, but never go one step before them in the way everlasting.

Some are nigh—They are moral in their lives, amiable in their tempers, teachable in their disposition; they seem as free from prejudice as from vice, and only require information and decision. Of such an one, our Saviour said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Others are far off—They are grossly wicked and abandoned, despisers of those that are good, profaners of the Sabbath, swearers, drunkards, and seem beyond the reach of reformation.

Some are nigh—They are the young, whose lives are free from care and trouble, whose understandings are not yet filled with error, whose consciences are not yet seared as with a hot iron, whose hearts are not yet hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, whose memories are retentive, and whose affections are tender and lively. Others are far off—They are the old, whose indispositions are inveterate, whose vices are deep-rooted, whose habits of evil have become a second nature—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" "With man it is impossible; but with God, all things are possible."

We could enlarge the number of cases. There are many who have advantages which others are denied. Some are rich, and others are poor—But the unsearchable riches of Christ are accessible to all. Some are learned, and others illiterate—But none can know divine things without a Divine teacher: and under his teaching, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.

The proclamation of the gospel is therefore addressed to all, without exception. And there is the greatest propriety in this: for if its language was not universal; if there were any exclusions or omissions, awakened souls, sensible of their desert, would be sure to appropriate them, and conclude that *they* had no part nor lot in the matter. But they cannot question whether they are sinners; and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. They cannot question whether they have been spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not: but these are invited to hear, that their souls may live. The Gospel affords a complete warrant for every man to believe on the Son of God. We are surely nigh or afar off: but the command is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

MAY 24.

"*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*"—2 Cor. iii. 17.

This is mentioned for two purposes. First, to characterize the Gospel. It is therefore called in the preceding verse, "the ministration of the Spirit." Secondly, to describe the Christian. Natural men have not the Spirit, and if they make a profession of religion, it is

only the form of godliness without the power —But Christians possess the Spirit. The Apostle takes this for granted in his Epistle to the Galatians, and therefore inquires not *whether* they had received the Spirit, but *how* they had received it: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith!"

But how is it to be ascertained whether we are made partakers of the Holy Ghost! Observe the reasoning of David; "That thy Name is near, thy wondrous works declare." He proves the presence of God from the agency of God. We are to do the same here. The residence of the Spirit is to be determined by the influences and operations of the Spirit. The Spirit makes those in whom he dwells "spiritual"—They "live in the Spirit"—and "walk in the Spirit"—and "worship God in the Spirit." "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the fruit of the Spirit;" and the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is—there is liberty."

Christians rejoice "in hope:" and there is a blessedness reserved for them in heaven called "the glorious liberty of the sons of God." But this is future: and the Apostle says where the Spirit of the Lord is—not there *shall* be—but there *is*, liberty. What liberty! A freedom from sin. A freedom in duty.

A FREEDOM FROM SIN. There is something in the very sound of slavery, that offends the ear and revolts the heart. Hence when our Lord spoke of making them free, the Jews answered, "We were never in bondage to any man; and how sayest thou then ye shall be made free!" Yet their whole history showed that they had been in vassalage to all the nearer, and to many of the remoter powers; and were even then a province of the Roman empire, paying tribute unto Cæsar. And thus men are unwilling to own that they are naturally enslaved. There is nothing they so glory in as their freedom. They despise or pity the godly as captives under the most melancholy and mortifying restraints; and therefore say, "Let us break *their* bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from *us*"—"With our lips will we prevail, our tongues are our own, who is Lord over us!" But while they use great swelling words of vanity, they themselves also are the servants of corruption: for of whom a "man is overcome, of the same he is brought into bondage." He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin; and of all wretches in the world, he serves the worst tyrant, and is employed in the vilest drudgery. Sometimes, like a madman, he dances and sings in his chains. But this is not always the case. The hypocrite may boast of pleasure which he never feels: but there is no peace unto the wicked. The way of transgressors is hard, as well as the end of these things death. Many effects, the natural produce of his iniquity, often make him groan inwardly. Stung with remorse and shame, he sometimes says, I will be such a slave no more—I will be free. And he resolves, but it is in his own strength. He is therefore overcome, and bound faster than before: and frequently the result of these short-lived reformations, put off as long as possible, resorted to with reluctance, and hated in the performance, is, that the latter end is worse than the beginning. At best, he only exchanges one sin for another; and while he gives up grosser transgressions, he comes under the power of more "spiritual wickedness," pride, self-righteousness, and unbelief. But if the Son makes him free, he is free indeed—For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Thus the Apostle says to the Romans; "Ye were the servants of sin, but have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered you." And "now being made free from sin, ye became servants unto God." "For he that is dead is freed from sin." He does not mean, freed from the very being of it—This would contradict the language of the Scripture at large, and make those sad whom God has commanded us to make merry. For what is the painful experience of every believer! He finds a law, that when he would do good, evil is present with him: he feels the sin that dwelleth in him: he groans, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But he is freed from the rule of it. It reigns in others, in their mortal bodies; and they obey it in the lusts thereof: but from this, Christians are delivered, and against the return of it they are secured; "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

They are also freed from the love of it. Persons may avoid that which is evil, and not abhor it. While inclination urges, authority may restrain, or the fear of consequences may deter. Many wish they could indulge themselves freely and safely in their criminal passions and pursuits; and therefore hate the law that forbids and threatens them. But Christians are not held back from sin against their wills; they are mortified to it. They are dead to sin. They have seen the evil of it in the cross. Is it possible that a mother could ever love the murderer of her child! But there is no love like that which the saved sinner bears to the Saviour. Can I ever be reconciled to that which made him bleed and die! Can I ever cherish that which grieves and dishonours him who loved me and gave himself for me!

"Furnish me, Lord, with heavenly arms,
From grace's magazine;
And I'll proclaim eternal war
With every darling sin."

MAY 25.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."—2 Cor. iii. 17.

A FREEDOM IN DUTY. There are some who dislike the word duty, though it is a word by no means unevangelical; for it entirely excludes the idea of merit: as that which is *due* cannot be meritorious. And are persons, in proportion as they are favoured, without obligations? Do not benefits gender claims to service? "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." David acknowledges this; "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds:" that is, thou hast loosened me to bind me—loosened me from disease and destruction, to bind me to love and serve my deliverer and benefactor. Those who dislike the word duty, it is to be feared, dislike the thing itself; and resemble Ephraim, who loved to tread out the corn, yet not to break the clods. But "the spiritual" can say, "his commandments are not grievous." They consider religious duties as privileges, and feel them such when the Lord is with them; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." To this David refers when he says, "Then shall I run in the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart." The heart is enlarged for obedience, when it is exempted from the influence of carnal considerations. When Paul received his trying commission, immediately, says he, I conferred not with flesh and blood. Flesh and blood are sad counsellors in the work of God; and it is easy to imagine what advice they would have given him. Some persons are not at liberty to pursue the way that they should choose. They feel restraints arising from their reputation, or connexions, or worldly advantage. They could easily decide whether the thing was true or right in itself; and this should be the only question; but before they act, they must know what people will think and say of them. Whether they shall not be charged with hypocrisy? or enthusiasm? or provoke an enemy? or lose a friend? or suffer in trade? Thus they are checked by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare. What snare? The danger of drawing back, or turning aside, instead of going forward and abounding in the work of the Lord; the danger of concealing or denying their principles, and conforming to the place and company they are in, instead of confessing the Saviour before men, and declaring themselves on the Lord's side. Now the grace of God delivers us from these preventions: it sets us free to follow the calls of duty; it induces us only to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And what a blessed liberty does a man then feel! Thus the bird that rises high and flies along is free from obstruction; and can move straight and quick: while the bird that keeps near the ground must make many a zigzag in his course, to avoid trees, and houses, and towers, and hills. A timid animal starts or creeps aside continually; but "the lion" keeps on in his march, "and turneth not away for any." And "the path of life is above to the wise." And "the righteous is bold as a lion." Conviction is a great source of courage, but affection is a greater. There is no fear in love, Perfect love casteth out fear. Love is strong as death: many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. What then will be the effect of the love of God shed abroad in the heart! "We cannot," said Peter and John, "but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Bunyan very wisely makes Mr. Greatheart the conductor of the pilgrims. How would they have been let and injured without him! But where he was, there was liberty.

The Christian is also enlarged for obedience by deliverance from formality. We may well talk of the dullness and deadness of formality. The effect of it in duty is to make our souls like Pharoah's chariots with the wheels off: we drag on heavily. But holy fervour makes us "like the chariots of Amminadib." Sails are useful, but what are they if there be no breeze? Nothing contracts and obstructs like the want of spirituality in religion. We sometimes complain of darkness; and darkness confines; but the rising sun releases the prisoners of night, and they go forth to their work and to their labour till the evening. We feel coldness; and coldness confines. The frost binds up the stream; but the melting causes it to flow. The winter holds back the powers of nature, and keeps barren the fields and the garden; but the warmth of spring sets free the principles of vegetation, and all is life and fertility. Such a difference is there in our devotional exercises, whether retired or public; between our frames, when we are left to ourselves, and when the Spirit helps our infirmities: and the preparation of the heart, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord.

We may add, that nothing more prepares for and aids us in the work of obedience than a discharge from the dread of condemnation. "The blood of Christ purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God." By dead works the Apostle means sins, which produce spiritual and deserve eternal death. The purging of the conscience from these does not here refer to sanctification, but to the effect of justification, in freeing us from a sense of guilt, and giving us peace and joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement. And this grace wherein we stand is not only the most delightful privilege, but according to the Apostle it is necessary to our serving

God. For how can we pursue our work to advantage while we are pressed down with a burden too heavy for us to bear? How must we be labouring in the fire, and wearying ourselves for very vanity, while we are thinking of atoning for our lives, or going about to establish our own righteousness! Believers have nothing to do here—Their sins are expiated; the righteousness in which they appear before God is provided. They therefore cease from their legal and tormenting drudgery, and enter into rest, and are made free indeed—and free to attend entirely to their grateful and pleasant work of pleasing and serving God in the Spirit of his Son—There is nothing servile in their obedience, and therefore it is not partial and constrained; but full, and of a ready mind—They are upholden by his "free Spirit." They are sons that serve him: for they have not received the spirit of bondage to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father. Not that they indulge in a careless, presumptuous manner in dealing with God; but they feel their relation to him, and knowing that God is not only pacified towards them, but that they are accepted in the Beloved, and are now not only reconciled but infinitely dear to him, they have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Jesus; and can draw near in full assurance of faith. They feel their unworthiness, but they know they are welcome—welcome to approach his gates—welcome to enter his house—welcome to sit down at his table—welcome to hang upon his arm—welcome to lean on his bosom—welcome at all times and in all circumstances to spread their wants and cares before him with a certainty of relief—For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!

While we believe the importance of the possession, and know that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his; let us rejoice that our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him; and that he giveth more grace. Let us therefore be enlarged in our desires; and not only have the Spirit, but be filled with the Spirit.

MAY 26.

"*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.*"—Heb. xii. 15.

We are here admonished not to "fail of the grace of God." There is a difference between failing *of* the grace of God, and failing *from* it. We are persuaded the Scripture gives no real countenance to the doctrine of falling from grace. The certainty of the end includes the necessity of the means; and therefore we can, with consistency, make use of every warning and motive against declension and apostasy, while yet we believe that the righteous shall hold on his way, and are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. When the angel had announced the safety of all on board, and the apostle believed God that it should be as it had been told him; yet he made no scruple to say to the Centurion and the soldiers, when the mariners were meanly leaving the vessel, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Dr. Owen, no mean critic, contends that the word here rendered to fail, signifies always to *want*, to *come short;* and never, to fall from actual possession. We say, the trees this year will fail of a crop: we say to a racer, see that you fail not of the prize, and to a warrior, see that you fail not of the victory; and in all these instances we intend not the loss of a thing when obtained, but the not obtaining it. The meaning therefore is, take heed that you miss not the grace of God; or, as it is expressed in an earlier part of the Epistle, "Therefore fear, lest, a promise being left you of entering into his rest, any of should seem to *come short of it.*"

The caution implies importance, acquirableness, and danger.

It implies *importance*—It is as much as to say, your supreme concern should be to secure the grace of God—This is the principal thing—

> "Sufficient in itself alone,
> And needful were the world our own."

Even the devil is good authority here; he knows the worth of what we neglect and despise; all his aims and devices are to keep us from seeking after it. The grace of God is—The only source of relief under conviction of sin—The only principle of true obedience—The only safeguard of prosperity The only support under trouble—The only deliverance from death—The only meetness for heaven—the evidence, the earnests, the foretastes, the beginning of eternal life.

It implies *acquirableness.* The admonition would be futile unless the grace of God were within our reach. It is impossible to read the Scripture, and not perceive that the inestimable blessing is not only revealed to our view, but proposed to our hope, and pressed upon our acceptation. We are commanded to be "renewed in the spirit of our minds;" and to be "filled with the Spirit:" but the command, or it would be absurd, involves the possibility of the thing. Grace is laid up in the Mediator for this very purpose. It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell for our use. "He received gifts for men, and even for the *rebellious* also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." We have also the promise; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." The invitation also is universal: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Look unto me, and be ye

saved, all the ends of the earth." We can appeal to actual instances. How many in heaven, how many also on earth, who by nature were all children of wrath, even as others, and in whom was no good thing, are now the partakers of the grace of God in truth! We are encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses; and each of them testifies that he is good and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto *all* that call upon him.

—But it implies *danger*. Unless it was possible, and *very* possible, that we should come short of it, the Apostle would not have expressed himself with such peculiar earnestness—"Looking"—"diligently;" nor have extended the caution to all, whatever advantages they have in their favour—"Lest *any* man fail of the grace of God." You may fail of the grace of God—Though you were born in a Christian country, and were baptized in your infancy—Though you were born of religious parents, and had a pious education—Though you attend the means of grace, and hear the truth as it is in Jesus—Though you have a clear knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel—Though you receive into your conviction and belief the faith once delivered to the saints—Though you have spiritual gifts, and can talk well and pray wisely—Though your passions are sometimes pleasingly and awfully excited—Though you have undergone a great change and reformation in your character and conduct—Though many think you have the grace of God, and you are admitted into the church, and admired while you live, and extolled when you die, and the funeral sermon and the magazine may speak of you as having entered into the joy of your Lord—Though you are persuaded yourselves that you are possessed of it, and carry the confidence to the very door of heaven, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us: we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets—But he shall answer, I know you not whence ye are—"

Of the numbers that came out of Egypt only two entered Canaan; though they did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

MAY 27.

"*And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*"—Acts xxvi. 29.

"Such as I *am*." And what *was* Paul? He was an Apostle. But he does not refer to this, or wish that his audience, like himself, were called to an extraordinary mission, or could speak with new tongues, and discern spirits, and heal diseases, and foretell things to come. He knew that official character and miraculous endowments were not things that accompany salvation. Balaam was a prophet, and Judas was an apostle. But Paul was *a Christian;* and to *this* his desire alludes. For his exclamation is in reply to the king's confession—"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be *a Christian*"—And Paul said, Would to God this was completely the case with thyself and this whole assembly—"Would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

Thus therefore he not only shows a consciousness of his Christianity, but the estimation in which he held the privilege of his state as a Christian. There was nothing he could wish for others, by an infinite degree so important and so valuable. For if they were Christians, he knew—They would be safe: for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. He knew—They would be honourable: the excellent of the earth, kings and priests unto God, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, the charge of angels, who are all sent forth to minister unto them that are the heirs of salvation. He knew—They would be happy: attaining what all others seek in vain: happy in hope, happy in fruition, happy in their comforts, happy in their duties, happy in their trials. He knew—They would be useful: not only being blessed in themselves, but proving blessings to others; the best benefactors of the human race, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, the salt of the earth, the light of the world—

But see his benevolence as well as wisdom. The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy. We love things to be exclusively our own. The child is pleased when no none has a bauble but himself. The female is afraid that her fashion should be known; her mode would lose half its value should the dress of another be as new, and pretty, and fine as her own—So it is with all ranks in life. But grace had dethroned this spirit in Paul. See the benevolence of his disposition in three things. First—The extent of his wish. It reaches to *all*. Yet some of his audience were not only heathens and Jews, but his bitterest enemies. Secondly, the degree of it—were not only *almost* but *altogether* such as I am. It is well to see people like the young man in the Gospel, not far from the kingdom of God. It is well to see them hearing the word, convinced, reformed. But they may be hearers of the word and not doers; convinced and not converted; reformed and not renewed. It is sad to go far, and come short at last—To be almost

justified is to be condemned; almost saved is to be lost. Thirdly, the exception—The chain he then wore, and which confined him to the soldier as a sufferer or a criminal, would be deemed painful or reproachful, and tend to scandalize Agrippa: he therefore says, except these *bonds*. This was a fine turn, and showed Paul to be a man of education and address. But it shows something more than his eloquence. He would not wish others to be tried, especially at first, as he was. *I* would bear willingly all my afflictions, till he for whom I suffer is pleased to release me: but I do not wish others to endure them. Let them have my privileges without my persecutions. Surely the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour! What a noble soul was here! Little and mean spirits can never rise to this. If they wish others to be *equal* to themselves, they cannot wish others *above* themselves. The Elder Brother could not bear the *degree* of the Prodigal's reception—Thou never gavest *me* a kid that I might make merry with my friends—Yet for him thou hast killed the *fatted calf*. But angels rejoice when a sinner, by repentance, is brought into a condition superior to their own. And we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.

But when Paul says, "*would to God*," that this was the case, it is to be considered as a real prayer, and shows not only his benevolence in wishing their conversion, but his belief and acknowledgment of Divine agency as necessary to accomplish it. He owned this with regard to himself. It pleased God to reveal his Son in me. He called me by his grace. By the grace of God I am what I am—not I, but the grace of God which was with me. He owned it always with regard to others. Read what he says of the Ephesians: "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) for by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." How can it be otherwise! If in him we live and move and have our being naturally, has the spiritual life, called the life of God, any thing less than a divine source for its origin and support? Hence the promise, "I will sprinkle clean water upon them—I will put my Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes."

To him therefore for this influence let us pray, not only for ourselves, but for others—for our families, friends, neighbours, all mankind. He is the God of all grace, and he answers relative as well as personal prayer. But let one thing be remembered; if our prayers are sincere, it will appear in our exertions; for God uses means, and makes us the instruments of his agency. And he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

MAY 28.

"*I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?*"—Job vii. 20.

Here is a confession, and an inquiry.

The confession seems to have nothing very discriminating in it. The manner in which it is used, and the sentiments from which it proceeds, can alone therefore evince the state of mind in him who employs it. In true penitence the confession will always be strictly personal. We may often hear the expression, "God knows we are all sinners," but the meaning of the exclaimers is to bring in others for a share, rather than to condemn themselves; and the universality of transgression is owned to extenuate the individuality. But, says the real penitent, "Behold, *I* am vile, what shall *I* answer?" "*My* sin is ever before me." And he confesses not only the fact of his sin, but the fault, the guilt, the desert—"I am not worthy to be called thy son." "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." And while he is candid towards others, because he knows not the extenuations which attach to their offences, he will be severe towards himself, for he is conscious of the aggravations of his own iniquities. And as sin is the transgression of the law, and the law is spiritual, extending to the state of his heart, and requiring his principles and motives to be good as well as his actions, and condemning omissions of duty as well as positive crimes, with his growing knowledge, his sins enormously multiply in number, and he only speaks the words of truth and soberness when he says, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me." True confession is also always accompanied with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Some speak of their sins, if not with pleasure, yet with a kind of indifference. But Ephraim bemoaned himself. The publican smote upon his breast. When Peter thought on his fall he wept bitterly. Of course there is also a disposition to sacrifice the evil deplored. Pharaoh and Saul more than once said, "I have sinned," yet went on still in their trespass. But he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy. He therefore will say, with Ephraim, "What have I any more to do with idols?" He will even

pluck out a right eye, and cut off a right hand, and cast it from him. Thus it was with the Ephesian converts. "Many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." What a sum to lose! Many would have sold these books; but these persons said, Though they have poisoned us they shall not infect others, and threw into the flames what might have yielded them near two thousand pounds. This was bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. A man, too, when divinely wrought upon, will in his confession acknowledge evils of which natural conscience never accuses us, such as spiritual pride self-righteousness, and the neglect and contempt of the provision made for the recovery of sinners, by which we frustrate the grace of God, and make Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. When therefore the Saviour says, the Spirit shall convince of sin, he adds, because they believe not on me. And no guilt will affect such a soul like this. And till we are led to the evil heart of unbelief, we overlook the root and the spring of our ruin, and stop only at the branches and the streams.

But here is also an inquiry—I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? It seems not at first view very intelligible. It may be taken two ways, requiring very different answers. First, What shall I do unto thee in a way of satisfaction or reparation for the wrong I have committed; so as to prevent the consequences of my guilt, and stop thy proceedings against me? This will be the immediate concern of the awakened sinner, and he will be able to give no sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids, till he finds a solution in his favour. Hence Micah represents such a man as asking, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" In reply to this, it must be said, we can do nothing, offer nothing. The very attempt would be adding insult to injury. But cannot we repair the evil by future good works and obedience? In the first place, we can only obey in the strength of God, and not in our own. Secondly, all the obedience we can render is always due to God, and therefore can never be meritorious in expiation of our offences: the payment of things present will not wipe off the old score. To which also we may add, that our obedience will be incomplete, and therefore instead of recompensing God any thing will fall short of his glory, and require pardon for it defects. The man soon sees this, and feels that he can make no atonement himself, and that the redemption of his soul must cease for ever, if it depends on any ransom he can furnish. And thus he would lie down in absolute despair, but for the light of the Gospel, which breaks in and shows him what in this case he *can* do. It is not to go about to establish his own righteousness, but to submit himself to the righteousness which is of God. It is not to toil, but believe—"To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." His only course therefore is to appeal; to take with him in the hand of faith the Surety of the new covenant, and to say, "Look upon the face of thine Anointed." "Let thy hand be upon the man of the right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name." Nothing else will avail; nothing else is necessary; but coming in his name, pleading his sacrifice, you will be accepted in the Beloved as if you had never sinned, and God will rejoice over you with joy.

Then, secondly, you will ask, what shall I do unto thee in a way of duty and thankfulness? And the inquiry thus made is not only allowable but commendable, and as to the feelings of the pardoned sinner unavoidable. Though he has nothing to do unto God in putting away sin, or bringing in a justifying righteousness, he is infinitely indebted to his goodness. He cannot discharge his obligations; but he feels them, and therefore must ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" What service shall I present him, not as a peace-offering but as a thank-offering? How shall I obey him, not as a slave, but a son! not as a mercenary, but as one who is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ? To him none of God's commandments are grievous. What he has to do all the days of his life is to love his benefactor, to fear to offend him, to pray that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart may be acceptable in his sight; it is, by the mercies of God to present his body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable; and by him only to make mention of his name.

MAY 29.

"*Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.*"—Gal. iv. 6.

We have heard of benefactors; and we have seen a happy few who seem to value their wealth only as the resource of kindness and mercy; and who make it the business of their lives to do good. But God is love; and all benevolence vanishes from a comparison

with the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. None ever relieved such numbers, succoured so freely, or gave so richly. What are the greatest favours conferred by human generosity! Survey the gifts of God. Consider only two of them—The Son of his love, and the Spirit of his Son—The one given for us; the other to us—The one peculiarly the promise of the Old Testament; the other of the New. Each of these is equally necessary in the process of our recovery. The Christian alike values both: and of both the Apostle here speaks: "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." Let us attend to the latter of these.

Who are the recipients? "*Sons*"—a name often given to the people of God in the Scriptures. They are subjects, and he is their Sovereign, and they owe him obedience; they are servants, and he is their master, and they owe him attendance—But these relations do not go far enough: they are not sufficiently affectionate, and near, and privileged, to express the state of Christians. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon them—They are called the sons of God. And *now* are they the sons of God. And they are so, not only or principally because they are the creatures of his power, but the partakers of his grace. And two ways the title is applied to them exclusively: adoption, and regeneration. For they are not only taken into the household of faith, but they are new born, born again, born of God. Among men these sources of filiation are never united. A man does not adopt those who are begotten of him. And when he admits the offspring of others into family relation, and gives them his name, he cannot convey to them his qualities. He may be generous, and they may be selfish; he may be meek, and they may be severe. He may indeed instruct and admonish them, and exemplify his requisitions in his own life: but this is all. But God not only changes our state, but our nature. He works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure—He speaks; he acts like himself—"Behold, I create all things new."

What is the blessing? "*The Spirit of his Son.*" There are several other places in which the Spirit is held forth by this relation to Christ. But wherefore? Peter, speaking of the prophets, says, "the Spirit of Christ which was in them, testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow"—It was employed in bearing witness to him from the beginning. Our Saviour also said, "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." He also personally possessed this Spirit, and was always actuated by it. "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. But the principal reason of the name is, that he procured this Spirit for us by his sufferings and death; the whole dispensation of it was lodged in his hands; and from *his* fullness all we receive, and grace for grace. Therefore he said to his disciples, "If I depart, I will send him unto you." "I will send you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." And Peter reports the accomplishment in a most signal instance: "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." It is therefore derived from him to us—"We have an unction from the Holy One."

Where does it reside? "Because we are sons, he hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son *into our hearts.*" Here God begins; "he shines in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." Here he places the riches of his grace, and "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The Lord looketh at the heart. If this be for him, every thing else will follow; but all is nothing without this. What is practice without principle, but a tree without a root, or a stream without a spring! But when the divine laws are put into our minds, and written in our hearts, our obedience is not only rendered certain, but natural and delightful. God of all grace! fulfil thy covenant engagement in my happy experience—"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." And may I "be filled with the Spirit."

We see from the whole the oneness there is between Christ and his people. They are predestinated to be conformed to his image, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. In all things indeed he has the pre-eminence. He is the Son of God in an unrivalled sense; but they also are sons. He had indeed the Spirit without measure; but they have it in degree; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his—and it is the *same* Spirit that resides in both—"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." This conformity extends to their future condition as well as their present character. "When he who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory." As they now "bear the image of the heavenly," in

having in them the mind that was in him, so they will hereafter corporeally resemble him; for "he shall change their vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body"—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when we shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

MAY 30.

"*Crying, Abba, Father.*"—Gal. iv. 6.

Such is the effect of the divine communication here spoken of—"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, *crying, Abba, Father.*" Every thing depends upon our possessing this Spirit; for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" But "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God, and if children then heirs." Hence it is also called "the earnest of our inheritance."

We should therefore be anxious to ascertain whether we have received the all-important benefit. And it is possible to determine this. For whenever the Spirit of Christ takes possession of the heart, its residence will be evinced—it will operate there. It finds us indeed in darkness, but it opens the eyes of our understanding, and makes us light in the Lord. It finds us earthly-minded and cleaving to the dust, but it induces us to seek those things that are above. The pretensions of a man therefore are vain unless he be made to differ from what he once was. The influence of the Spirit is compared to leaven in the meal, and leaven will work; to fire, and fire will burn; to water, and the spring will flow out in streams—If, says the Apostle, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts," it is not inactive or silent there, but—*crying, Abba, Father.* Let us observe the exercise, and the influence that produces it.

The exercise intended is prayer; but the representation is peculiar. It is not said *what* they will pray for; indeed it would be endless to specify their wants and desires; and "for *all* these things," says God, "will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." But we are told *how* they pray—*Crying, Abba, Father.* Does not this intimate the *simplicity* of their prayer? "Because," says Solomon, "God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth, therefore let thy words be few;" and how brief and free from every thing studied and artificial are the prayers recorded in the Scriptures, and which were offered by persons under the most powerful and favourable impressions! "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee." "Lord, save, I perish." "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—Such is the language of feeling—So it is when the heart speaks.

Does it not intimate the *confidence* with which they pray? Among the Persians there was a law that whosoever presented himself before the king, unless he was first called to go in, should be put to death. We have no such prohibition. The golden sceptre to us is always stretched forth. We have a general, a universal invitation to draw near at all times, and in all circumstances, in every thing by prayer and supplication to make known our requests unto God: and are authorized to address him not as the Infinite, the Eternal, the Almighty, the first cause and the last end of all things; but as our Father, though he is in heaven. It is not the spirit of bondage to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father. It is not the address of a criminal to a judge; nor of a slave to a master: but of a child to a Father, to whom he is most intimately related, and who feels in him the claims of nature and affection. "I write unto you, little children," says John, "because ye have known the Father." Who is a child so likely to know as his father? What is the first name he utters but "my father, or my mother?" To whom is he so likely to flee in every danger? On whom in every distress will he call so freely for relief! He relies upon his care; he expects that he will teach him, and defend him, and provide for him—And will not God who stands in this endearing relation exemplify it? And fulfil it *perfectly* and *divinely?* Let this therefore encourage and embolden us in our approaches to him.

Does it not also imply *earnestness?* The word "crying" would express this alone, but here is added to it the reduplication, "Father, Father!" This surely marks eagerness and fervency. The importance of such importunity our Saviour illustrates in the manner of him who spake as never man spake—"Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him! And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He himself also was an example of this. "In the days of his flesh with strong cryings and tears he made supplications to him who was able to save him from death:" and the true condition, exigences, and dangers of his

followers when realized and felt will urge them to pray in the same manner.

But does not this indicate *the accordance* of their prayers? Whatever distinctions prevail among them, the Lord gives them one heart and one way. They all kneel before the same mercy-seat; and address the same God, the God of all grace. "Abba" signifies father; but the word is Syriac; and this was, when Paul wrote, the common language of the Jews. The word rendered father is Greek in the original. And thus we see that the same Spirit would actuate the inhabitants of every country; Jews and Gentiles would appropriate the same relation. "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." "For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." What father, is, in China, in Tartary, or among the Esquimaux, we know not: but he who made them, and gave his Son to die for them, understands all their dialects; and the hour is coming when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

But we here see the source of all this—It is the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts that "cries, Abba, Father." It is therefore called "the Spirit of grace and of supplication." And we are said to "pray in the Holy Ghost." It is he that shows us our state, and causes us to hunger and thirst after righteousness. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." He enables us to believe on the Mediator, and thus gives us boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. He makes us spiritually-minded, and renders prayer our privilege; and we feel that it is good for us to draw near to God. Hence we are constant in the performance of it: for if we delight ourselves in the Almighty, we shall always call upon God.

A weighty inference is derivable from hence. We cannot say too much in recommendation of prayer with regard to our trials, duties, and improvements. Prayer is the life of religion—But what is the life of prayer? "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Wherefore, first, let us not grieve the Holy Spirit, and cause him to withdraw or suspend his influences. And, secondly, let us pray for the Spirit, that we may pray with it. If there be any inconsistency in this, our Saviour has sanctioned it: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

MAY 31.

"*That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*"—Heb. vi. 18.

One of these two things was his promise, the other was his oath. The Apostle acknowledges that *both* of them were immutable. Why then was the latter added to the former? Not to *constitute*, but to *show* the immutability of his counsel. It was not to bind himself; but it was for our sakes, that in the condescension of his kindness he might remove from our minds all suspicion of his veracity, by adopting the last mode of appeal among men; "For verily men swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife"—God therefore swears, and because he could swear by no greater, he swears by himself—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth"—Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee—as sure as I am God." Four things result from hence.

We First see how hard it is to comfort the conscience, and to inspire us with "a strong consolation," not only while we are fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, but even after we *have* fled. We have a controversy with God, and we know that he has much ground against us: and a consciousness of guilt makes us timid and suspicious. Under a sense of our unworthiness, the very greatness of the blessing will astonish us into incredulity: "It is too good to be true, at least with regard to such a wretch as I am." Men are frail and false, and we ourselves are weak and changeable; and in judging of him insensibly transfer something of this to God, if we do not think him altogether such an one as ourselves. How natural and justifiable it seems to give up persons after numberless provocations of ingratitude and vileness! Dark providences apparently oppose the promises: deep and lengthened afflictions depress and weaken the mind, and betray us to think that God has forgotten to be gracious. The blessing we so much desire seems to recede as we advance after it; and hope deferred maketh the heart sick. We look at our work and our danger; and yet feel more of our ignorance and weakness. Experience can not only attest all this, but also add much to the representation. But here is enough to depress and intimidate—and we may be assured that God does nothing in vain—but he who knows what is in man, judged it necessary, not only to speak, but to swear: "that by two

immutable things" he might comfort and establish our hearts.

We see, Secondly, How concerned he is for the consolation of his people. He takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants; and they never appear to such advantage as when they walk in the light of his countenance, rejoice in his name all the day, and in his righteousness are exalted. It is then they do honour to their religion, and commend the ways of godliness to others—"Here are people who are happy in this vale of tears. What we seek after constantly, and never come in sight of, they have found. Their hearts are at rest. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." The joy of the Lord is not only their ornament, but their strength. It enlivens them in duty: they never run in the way of his commandments so freely as when God has enlarged their hearts. It emboldens them in their profession—It raises them above the fear of man—It weans them from the world—It bears them up under the trials of life—It raises them above the fear of death. He therefore that is infinitely concerned for their welfare, and knows perfectly wherein it consists, would have them not only safe, but tranquil; not only holy, but joyful; not only walking in the fear of the Lord, but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; not only possessing real, but "strong consolation."

We Thirdly perceive, What a foundation is laid for the effectual solace of the subjects of divine grace. What more could God have done than he has done to meet their infirmities, and disperse all their discouragements?—We have not only his word but his oath. Surely he has not only given them "a good hope through grace," but provided amply for "the full assurance of hope unto the end." Surely confidence becomes them as well as self-abasement. Surely they ought to attain a certainty of mind, and to be filled with all joy and peace in believing. And why are they not decided? Why do they yet walk mournfully before the Lord?

"Whence then should doubts and fears arise?
Why trickling sorrows drown our eyes?
Slowly, alas! our mind receives
The comforts that our Maker gives."

Lastly, we learn the perverseness and vileness of unbelief. There is nothing of which men are more tenacious than their reputation for truth. The least imputation thrown upon their veracity, rouses them to demand satisfaction for the unpardonable offence—though it has only regarded their mere word, and not the added solemnity and sanction of an oath. What has God, who is conscious that he is faithfulness itself,—what has he to bear with from us! Unbelief not only contradicts him; not only gives him the lie, but accuses him of perjury—"I no more depend upon thy oath than upon thy word"—And yet the thunder stays!

What do we in our retirement! To how little purpose do we humble ourselves, before God, unless we principally grieve over our slowness of heart to believe! Every thing else will be hacking at the boughs with a feather—We must "lay the axe to the root of the tree"—an "evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." "Lord, I believe—help thou mine unbelief."

JUNE 1.

"*Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.*"—Psalm lxxi. 3.

On what particular occasion this psalm was composed it would not be easy to determine. Neither is it necessary; or perhaps even desirable. It is sufficient to see that David was in much affliction, but well knew that God was his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore to him he turns with this pathetic language; "Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort."

It is well to take advantage of our present feelings and circumstances to aid us in our communion with God. Many have supposed that David was now suffering from the rebellion of his son Absalom. If there be truth in the notion, it is not difficult to imagine the scene. Behold him greyheaded; the fire of youth that had heroically encountered the lion, and the bear, and the Philistine, damped by the chillness of age; his chief counsellor betraying him; the hearts of the people stolen from him; his army inadequate to his defence; himself forced from his palace; fleeing from place to place, an exile in his own country; and full of uncertainty as to the issue—at such a time how natural, and suitable, and satisfying must it have been to realize God as his hiding-place, resting-place, dwelling-place—the *strength* and the *home* of his heart!

What so pitiable as a homeless wretch? A Christian can never be in this condition. There is nothing for which we should be more thankful than domestic peace and comfort: and there are some whose abode abounds with every attraction and delight. But how different is the state of others. They have been stripped of "lover and friend:" those with whom they "took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company, are no more:" their means of hospitality and enjoyment are reduced to straits and privation; or they feel some heart's bitterness known only to themselves, and which they are not at liberty to divulge—Thus "thorns are in their tabernacle," and they are ready to cry, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then

would I flee away and be at rest." But you need not flee *from* your condition; rest may be found *in* it—in the bosom of your God and Saviour. And the less happiness you have in the creature, the more you should repair to his all-sufficiency. Your distresses are designed to urge you to him; and if they have this effect, it will be good for you that you have been afflicted. Thus fine weather leads us abroad, and we sometimes take long walks: but clouds and storms hasten us homeward.

David would find and enjoy God, not only as his habitation, but as his "strong" habitation—such an habitation as would not fall by decay, nor be thrown down by violence, nor be entered by any enemy; in which the inhabitant would not only be free from danger, but feel himself secure. But every earthly strong-hold, however befriended by nature, or indebted to art, is only a shadow of the safety the believer finds in the perfections and covenant-engagements of God. No force, no stratagem of men or devils can prevail to destroy or injure him who has made the Lord his trust. He is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: and when he can realize it by faith, his soul dwells at ease; and he is in quiet from the fear of evil.

He would also make use of him under the character of his strong habitation—"Whereunto I may continually resort." Would he then want to repair to him always? Our necessities, our work, our danger, require it constantly. We are commanded to pray without ceasing. And if while we acknowledge and feel the obligation, we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, we shall not lament it. Loving him as well as depending upon him, we shall find it good to draw near to God, and delight ourselves in the Almighty. And we shall never find him when we want him inaccessible. There is a way to our strong habitation, and we know the way. There is a door, and we have the key. No sentinel keeps us back: the dwelling is our *own;* and who dares to forbid us all its accommodations and contents?

Kings, however disposed, cannot be always approachable. Owing to the multitude of their claims, and the limitation of their powers, and the importance of keeping up a sense of their dignity, they are only accessible at certain times, and with stately formalities. But the King of kings allows us to come boldly to the Throne of grace; and enjoins us in every thing, by prayer and supplication, to make known our requests unto him. We cannot be too importunate, or by our continual coming weary him.

Who is like unto thee among the gods? Teach and enable me to improve my privilege. Thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

JUNE 2.

"*They went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame.*"—Hosea ix. 10.

That is, to that shameful idol. Many seem disposed to consider idolatry rather as a foolish and harmless thing than as a serious evil. But the Scriptures speak of abominable idolatries, and always connect such worships with the most infamous passions and vices. History attests the same fact; and the more fully and faithfully the subject is examined, the more will idolatry appear to be nothing better than evil personified, the devil deified, and hell formed into a religious establishment. What a force must revenge, cruelty, drunkenness, and sensuality acquire when not only exempted from punishment, but turned into acts of devotion, and considered as services which would render them acceptable to the divinity adored! We cannot enter into exemplifications—It were a shame to speak of those things which were done of them in secret. Who would not encourage missionary exertions! Who would not cry, day and night, Let thy way be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations!

But what is said of Baal-peor will apply to any kind of transgression. When you addict yourselves to sin, you separate yourselves to shame. Hence, says God, "Thou shalt remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth more, because of thy *shame;*" that is, thy sin. Sin is very properly called shame, for it is the most scandalous business in the world, and sooner or later will cover a man with ignominy. It degrades every thing pertaining to him, and makes him viler than the earth. Indeed nothing else is truly shameful. It is not shameful that you are obliged to labour; though it is shameful if you do nothing, or have nothing to do—I would rather, says Seneca, be sick than idle. It is not shameful that you are poor; unless your indigence is the offspring of vice. It is not shameful to suffer, unless you are the martyrs of Satan—But it is shameful to be a sinner. Is it not shameful to go uncovered and naked? To possess reason, and play the part of an idiot? To be a coward, and flee when no man pursueth? To have liberty at command, and submit to be a slave? To be a thief, and a robber of churches? To be a traitor to the best of sovereigns; a betrayer of the kindest of friends? To be admitted by a benefactor to his table, and enjoy every supply and indulgence; and then oppose him and endeavour to stab him to the heart? They who are familiar with the word of truth know that these and many other images are employed by the sacred writers to express the disgracefulness of the sinner's conduct.

We may consider the shamefulness of sin three ways. First, as a penal effect—This

is principally future. Of Israel we read, "They shall never be ashamed or confounded, world without end." And John tells us that Christians will "have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." But the reverse is true of the wicked, and we are assured that they will "rise to everlasting shame and contempt." And no wonder—when they find *what* they have sacrificed, and *for* what they have parted with it; when they find what they have incurred, and how they were warned of it, and admonished against it, and might have escaped it; when they find how they are laid open from every disguise and concealment, and their secret sins published in the hearing of men and angels as well as of the Judge—Then will they call upon the rocks and mountains, not so much to crush as to hide them from the scorn of the universe. But the penalty begins here; even here a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame; and when secured from legal inflictions, he draws upon himself disgrace, and has "many a curse."

Secondly, as a natural emotion. Thus, when Adam and Eve had transgressed, they hid themselves among the trees of the garden; so closely did shame tread on the heels of sin. This class of feelings may in a great measure be subdued by continuance in sin, which is of a hardening nature. We read of some who "hide not their sin as Sodom." Jeremiah says, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Yea, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush." But though shame is not a universal, it is a very general sentiment; and it is not easy, or perhaps possible to get rid of it entirely. Before their fellows men may profess what is very inconsistent with their convictions alone: they may pretend to laugh, and enjoy self-approbation, while their understandings reproach them as much as their consciences condemn. Why do the wicked repair to corners and elude observation, if they were not doing what tended to their disparagement, for in many of these cases they run no risk unless with regard to their reputation. If not ashamed of their practices, why attempt to deny or palliate? why frame excuses and apologies? why plead ignorance, mistake, surprise, temptation? why ascribe their sins to necessity, or weakness, rather than inclination and choice, unless they deemed them reproachful?—Hence too the sinner cannot endure to be alone; and though naturally full of self-love and admiration, he slips away from his own presence, and shuns intercourse with his greatest favourite, himself, because he cannot bear reflecting upon his conduct. Hence too after a while he renounces the moral world, and mingles only with those of his own quality, where mutual wickedness prevents mutual accusation, and censure, and scorn.

Thirdly, as a penitential experience. This is the result of divine grace. It regards not so much the opinion of our fellow-creatures as the judgment of God; not so much our character as our guilt; not so much the punishment as the pollution of sin; not so much its consequences as its odiousness and desert. And this extends to every thing sinful. For some sins are generally if not universally offensive; but all sin is the abominable thing which the soul of a true penitent hates. When a man is enlightened to see sin in the glass of the law, and in connexion with the glory and goodness of God, and in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, what self-condemnation and reproach does he feel! The publican "would not lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast." David cries, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, that I cannot look up." Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed to lift up my face to thee, for our iniquities are over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the very heavens." Blessed experience! If painful, it is salutary. It attracts the divine regard: it is a time of love in which he says unto us, "Live." "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him. saith the Lord."

JUNE 3.

"*Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad.*"—Acts xi. 23.

Grace means divine influence; and is so called because it is derived from the free and undeserved communication of God. But is not this grace an internal principle? How then could Barnabas see it? He could see it only in the effects. We cannot see life in itself; but we can see the sparkling eye, and the ruddy countenance, and the outstretched arm, and the moving foot! We need not cut down a tree, and lay open the body, to see by the grain of the wood of what sort it is. There is another and a better way—It is to judge by the bark, the leaves, the blossoms, the fruit! "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is

known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." God says, "I will put my Spirit within you"—But how can this be seen? "And cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them"—This is discernible enough. James says, "I will show thee my faith by my works;" this is, I will evince my creed in my conduct, and my principles in my practice—And this is the most satisfactory mode of showing them.

God determines to get himself glory by his people in this world; and therefore it is said, "all that see them shall acknowledge that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." But if his grace is to be thus seen and owned in them, there must be something in them more than experience. We are far from undervaluing experience; there is no real religion without it; and it is from your inward dispositions you must chiefly assure your own minds before God: but as to others, they cannot read your hearts—but they can read your lives; and therefore in your lives your godliness must appear. Therefore it is said "to the prisoners, go forth; to them that are in darkness, show yourselves: they shall feed in the ways, and their pasture shall be on all high places." And again: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Much of the minds of persons may be discovered, by the objects which awaken their attention and desires when they first enter a place. Some look after natural scenery. Some after curiosities. Some after kinds and modes of trade. Some after machinery, and buildings, and libraries. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the Spirit. Barnabas, as soon as he came to Antioch, looked about for displays and instances of divine agency; and when he saw the grace of God "he was *glad*." The sight would not have been pleasing to all. The enemy of souls would have been enraged at the prospect. The elder brother would not go in to share the joy of the father and the family; and was offended at the Prodigal's return and reception. So are Pharisees now—

> "While the wide *world* esteems it strange,
> Gaze and admire, and hate the change."

But salvation is "the pleasure of the Lord." Angels, in the presence of God, rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. And every convert may say, with the Royal Penitent, "They that fear thee will rejoice when they see me, because I have hoped in thy truth"—

Love to God made Barnabas rejoice. What is every sinner called by grace, but an accessior to his subject; an enemy turned into a friend; who shall show forth his praise by living to his glory, and by being a monument of his mercy and power? "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Benevolence made him glad. And Barnabas was a good man, as well as full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. What generous mind can see without feelings of pleasure, the hungry fed, the destitute clothed, the sick recovered, the captive loosened from his chains? But what is every other deliverance, compared with salvation from the evil of sin? What is every other acquisition, to the gain of that godliness which is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is to come? He prospers whose soul prospers and is in health. He is free indeed whom the Son makes free. He is rich who has the gold tried in the fire. And every subject of divine grace is not only blessed in himself, but is made a blessing to others. He is now become one of those who, by their prayers, example, and endeavours, are the greatest benefactors of the human race. They are a dew from the Lord; as showers upon the grass. "For them the wilderness and solitary place shall be made glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." When we see a sinner turned into the way of life, who can imagine what he may become? That persecutor now asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? may preach the faith that once he destroyed. That profane tinker now beginning to weep and pray, may become a writer, and, by his Pilgrim's Progress and Holy War, may charm and edify the Church to the end of time.

Barnabas rejoiced as a minister. Some enter the sacred calling, only looking after support, emolument, or fame. The salvation of souls is nothing to them. But with "a man of God" it is the end of his office, the answer of his prayers, the reward of his labours, his best hire. Such a man has the spirit of his function; and among all his tribulations nothing comforts him like success in the conversion and edification of his hearers—he lives if they stand fast in the Lord.

But Barnabas, though a minister, had not been the means of producing the grace of God which he saw: yet he was glad when he saw it. Some cannot rejoice in the good done by others, especially by those who are not of their own community. They would confine the work of the Lord to the pale of their own denomination; and are grieved rather than pleased when they see another casting out devils in his name, because he walketh not with them. But a Barnabas can say, not only, "Let him alone," but, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Let God employ and bless what instruments *he* pleases—Therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

JUNE 4.

'O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee."—Psalm xlii. 6.

Afflictions are often in the Scriptures called temptations and trials. The reason is, because they serve to prove and evince our principles, dispositions, and resources. It is natural, and almost unavoidable for men in difficulties and distresses to repair to something that promises to afford deliverance, or at least to temper the bitterness of sorrow. And as every creature is insufficient to succour them, their applications are various and numerous, and none of them are available. Therefore at last disappointed and confounded, they class the comforts with the crosses, and the good with the evil, and acknowledge, "*all* is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The believer has only one resource; but this is an adequate, and an infinite relief. And therefore instead of running up and down the earth, asking, "Who will show me any good?" he says, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." It is not improper, as a brother is born for adversity, to go to a dear and valued connexion, and pouring our tears into his bosom, say, O my friend, my soul is cast down within me—But it is better for the eye to pour out tears unto God! Far better to look upward and say, with David, "*O my God*, my soul is cast down within me"—

David claims God as *his* God. And how desirable is it when we address him, especially in trouble, to be able to deal with him on the ground of assured interest in him! It is therefore promised; "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

Yet his claim does not hinder his complaint. Many are perplexed by what, if properly viewed, might rather encourage them. They exclaim, "If I am his, why am I thus?" Not considering that they are thus because they are his. They are pruned because they are vines; they are put into the furnace because they are gold; they are chastened because they are sons—for what son is he whom the father chastened not? They think their depressions are peculiar—But David was a man after God's own heart, and had more experimental religion than any individual before the coming of Christ; yet he was not only afflicted, but his distress broke through to his mind, and pressed it down to the ground—"My soul is cast down within me." While all is calm and vigor within, the pressure of outward calamity is easily borne. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?—and who can cure? Only the God of all grace, and the God of all comfort. Let us therefore go to him. He alone can alter the state and frame of our minds who has access to them, and dominion over them. When a watch is disordered, to have it examined and rectified we naturally take it to the maker, who knows all its powers and movements: so God is the former of our spirits, and he can set them right again—"*Therefore*," says David, "I will remember thee."

Such a resolution is not natural to us. God deserves indeed our remembrance, and is perpetually demanding it. He addresses us by his word; he speaks to us by conscience—but in vain. He endeavours to awaken our attention and regard by a profusion of benefits—but though the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, we do not know, or consider. He therefore tries a different expedience—"I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." What we refused to see and hear we are made to feel. His captivity led Manasseh to pray to the God of his father. The famine made the prodigal think of his father's house. What brought so many to our Saviour in the days of his flesh but personal and relative trouble? It is the same now. He breaks up our earthly schemes, and then presents a better country to our pursuit. He removes the human arm on which we leaned, and then offering his own, says, "There—take hold of my strength." He hedges up our way with thorns, and makes a wall, that we cannot find our paths while following after our lovers; so that we have only one passage open—and this is to go back—and back we must return—if we would find him whom we had forsaken—for *he* remains where he was—and instead of rejecting us, cries, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."

And thus the same method which brings God to our remembrance at first is useful in our after religious life for the same purpose. For we are not already perfect. Our affections are sometimes chilled, and our minds are often turned away from our portion by other things. And there is peculiar danger of this in easy and prosperous circumstances. It is when our gourd flourishes, and we sit under its shadow with delight, that we are ready to say, "It is good for us to be here:" and so "to forget our resting-place." But God loves us too well to suffer us to take up with any thing short of himself. He does not stand in need of us; but he knows that without him we are miserable. He therefore brings us into conditions which show us the weakness and wretchedness of the creature, and induce us to inquire, "Where is God my maker that giveth songs in the night?" Then we think of him—And whom can we think of so properly and efficiently in the hour of

distress? When therefore our souls are cast down within us, let us remember him. Let us remember his power. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Let us remember his wisdom. He knows how to afflict; and he knows how to deliver. Let us remember his goodness. Our welfare is his aim in every dispensation however trying. He spared not his own Son. Let us remember his providence. He is always near us. He numbers the hairs of our head. Let us remember his holy covenant. What promises does it contain! It insures every thing we need. This was all David's salvation, and all his desire—This is my comfort in my affliction; thy word hath quickened me—And how many can say after him—

"Had not thy word been my delight,
When earthly joys were fled;
My soul, oppress'd with sorrow's weight,
Had sunk amongst the dead."

JUNE 5.

"*Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day.*"—Deut. xxxii. 46.

"ALL these words" were the language which he had just ended, the histories which he had recapitulated, and the positive ordinances and moral injunctions which he had again laid before them. Now if Moses enjoined the Jews to attend cordially to a portion of Revelation comparatively small, how much more does God require us to pay this regard to the whole! See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven—And who is *now* saying, "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day."

Set your hearts to HEAR all these words. When you are forbidden to be hearers only; it supposes that you are hearers really: and when you are admonished to take heed *what* you hear, and *how* you hear, the practice itself is enjoined in the very regulation of the mode. Hearing is not only a duty, but a privilege. And when we consider not only the adaptation there is in preaching to produce the effect, but the blessing of God that attends his own institution, we need not wonder that "faith cometh by hearing."

Set your hearts to READ all these words. We cannot be hearing always; and there are times when we cannot hear at all. In such cases reading is a substitute for hearing; and in all others reading must accompany and follow hearing. We cannot dispense with it at the family altar, or in our private retirement, without injury and sin. Hale could say in one of his letters to his children, "If I omit reading a portion of the Scriptures in the morning, nothing goes well with me through the day."

Set your hearts to UNDERSTAND all these words. "Let him that readeth understand"—Without this the perusal will be little more than a mere mechanical exercise. We should endeavour to obtain clear and consistent views of the subject that comes under our notice; we should pause, and reflect; we should consider the design of the writer in the paragraph; observe the strain of his language; compare one part of the contents with another; and pray for the Spirit that leads into all truth.

Set your hearts to REMEMBER all these words. "By which," says the Apostle, "ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have written unto you." Our memory should be like the ark in which were kept the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the law. Nothing can affect us morally when it is out of the mind. Some, to excuse their recollecting so little of what they read, and hear, complain of their memory. Yet they recollect a multitude of things without number—This shows the natural faculty is not wanting. "But we can remember some things so much easier than others." This adds to our censure. For what things are they which you *do* remember most easily? Are they not those with which you are most familiar! to which you are most attentive and attached? and which are most suitable to your taste? And should not this be the case with the things of God? Can a woman forget her sucking child? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?

Set your hearts to the PRACTICE of all these words. It cannot be imagined that they are written only to amuse curiosity, or inform the mind, or furnish materials for conversation and controversy—What are its warnings unless we are cautioned by them? or its promises unless we embrace them? In vain it shows unto us the way of salvation, unless we walk in it. It cannot profit us unless it be mixed with faith: and it works effectually in them that believe. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

Set your hearts to RECOMMEND and DIFFUSE them. Begin at home. "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Hold forth the word of life wisely in your discourse, accompanied with every holy and lovely temper. Furnish with a copy those who are destitute. Feel an anxiety

that every human being may have a Bible. For this purpose encourage and aid that glorious institution whose godlike and only aim is to spread the Scriptures at home and abroad, till the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas. Thus set your hearts unto all the words of this testimony. It is the command of God; and he who lives in the neglect of it is a rebel as much as a thief or a murderer. It is the command of the great God who is able to enforce it. It is the command of the good God, who has conferred so many benefits, and has so many claims upon you. It is the command of the only wise God, who knows what is good for you, and only demands what is a reasonable service.

—All these words too are divine—All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The very name of some authors would be enough to induce you to purchase and devour a publication. On the back of my Bible is inscribed, THE WORKS OF GOD.

They are also all important. They are not a vain thing, but our life. They are our standard. Our rule. Our medicine. Our shield. Our sword. Our bread. Our water. Our sun. The charter of our everlasting privilege —Who can tell what it has done for numberless individuals? For communities? For nations?—Who can tell what it will do in the ages to come?

JUNE 6.

"*And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*" —Gen. xxxii. 24.

JACOB was now returning with a large family and much abundance from Haran, and the house of his infamous uncle Laban. Thither he had fled from the face of his brother Esau, till his fury should be abated. But his resentment seems not to have yielded to time; for Jacob is informed of his approach, and four hundred men with him, and no doubt with murderous design. Here was an embarrassment! But God had said to him, "Return:" and he had also said, "I will surely do thee good"—This was his encouragement. But what was his conduct! It equally expressed prudence and piety. He sends forward a present, with a soft answer, that turneth away wrath; and then he has recourse to prayer. For except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. When we have arranged our plans, and secured our means, and done all that we can do, we must cast our care upon him that careth for us, and say, "O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." Jacob found prayer not only his duty, but his privilege. How pitiable are those in trouble who cannot say from experience, "It is good for me to draw near to God." In the perplexities, dangers, distresses of life; in the loss of relations, the failure of friends, the insufficiency of creature-helpers;—how relieving to the burdened spirit is it to say, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me."

—Imagine Jacob's situation. He was left alone. His family had been sent forward. It was now past midnight. No noise was heard. Perhaps no star was seen. He was kneeling on the ground in prayer, with his eyes closed, or raised towards heaven—when he felt the fingers of some one, seizing and grappling him—and he started up and closed with his antagonist—and endeavoured to maintain his standing against him—There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Wrestling is a trying and close combat, in which we can only engage personally, hand to hand; it allows not of seconds and helpers; and the aim of each is to throw the other upon the ground. Jacob's opponent came as his friend; but how could Jacob think so at first, when instead of being lulled to sleep, he was grasped and pulled to and fro with violence! Though mercy brings him, the Lord's coming to his people is often alarming in appearance and apprehension. He works by unlikely means, and in a way the most strange. He impoverishes in order to enrich; wounds us in order to heal; by legal despair he brings us into the hope of the gospel; and by death leads us to life eternal. Let us welcome him in whatever manner he may appear. Job could say, "He hath taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces"—But he could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

The affair was not a vision, but a real transaction. We may however make two inquiries. First; who was this mysterious personage that strove with Jacob? Hosea calls him the "the angel;" he is here called "a man"—yet the prophet says, Jacob "had power with God:" and Jacob himself says, "I have seen God face to face." What can we do here, but have recourse to "the angel of the covenant?" to him of whom Paul speaks, when he says, "Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:" to him of whom John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." "His goings forth were of old, from everlasting." "He rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." Thus he often assumed a human shape, as an emblem and earnest of his real incarnation in the fullness of time. Secondly; what was the

nature of this wrestling? It was partly corporeal, as is undeniable from the injury he received in his thigh; and partly spiritual, as an inspired expositor tells us that "he wept and made supplication unto the angel." These are the severest trials in which God at once exercises both the body and the mind. Yet it is no unusual thing for sickness and straits in circumstances to blend with internal conflicts—"Without," says Paul, "are fightings, and within are fears:" and, says David, "Heal me, for my bones are vexed; my soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?"

It is from this exercise of Jacob's that prayer has been so frequently called wrestling with God. Formalists know nothing of the force of the image: but *they* know the meaning of it, who feel their guilt, and are pressed down by a sense of their unworthiness and imperfections; who are in earnest as to their object; and whose cry is nothing less than "Lord, save, I perish."

—We cannot determine how long the contest had lasted, but it seems to have been several hours. During all this time, though Jacob stood his ground, he got no advantage until the breaking of the day—Then the scene changed, and relief was obtained. The Lord often tries the patience of his people; he delays their desires, and under the suspension, they sometimes are ready to say, Why should I wait for him any longer? Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when it cometh it is a tree of life; and come it will in God's own time, and will not tarry a moment beyond it. "Weeping may endure for a night: but joy cometh in the morning." What applies to any particular dispensation will apply to life itself—What is it but wrestling until the breaking of the day? But the night is far spent, and the day is at hand.

JUNE 7.

"*And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh.*"—Gen. xxxii. 25, 26.

It is wonderful that Jacob was able to maintain the contest as he did. Never was there such an unequal match. The wrestling was between a poor worm and the Lord of all. What would have been the consequence, if things had taken their natural course, but Jacob's overthrow? How then did he stand? Not from his own sufficiency, but from the condescension and kindness of his opponent, who instead of striving against him with his great power, put strength in him, and sustained him in the encounter.

Yet the Lord would remind him of his weakness. He therefore touched and disjointed the hollow of his thigh. This was to intimate that if he should gain the victory, he was not, as he otherwise might have done, to ascribe it to himself. Good men in their attainments and successes are in danger of self-elation; and it is necessary to keep them from their purpose, and to hide pride from them. Paul after his revelations had a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure. All our honours and comforts must have some alloy. In sailing, the ballast is as necessary as the sails, and the one must be in proportion to the other.

But does not Jacob yield now? No; he keeps on wrestling, though in pain, and even lamed, and therefore obliged to grasp the closer and firmer to keep him from falling. So we are to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and to pray and not faint. Whatever discouragements we meet with, we are not in our wrestling to give up: and when we cannot pray as we would, we must pray as we can, and not discontinue the exercise because of infirmity and imperfections.

"Let me go," says the angel. Yet could not he who by a touch only had disjointed Jacob's thigh, have easily disengaged himself from his hold? And does he ask for permission to withdraw? He gives intimation of his departure, to excite the more earnest supplication for his continuance. When he was with the two disciples at Emmaus he made as though he would have gone further: he designed to enter with them—but not without pressing; and they constrained him, saying, abide with us—and he went in to tarry with them. So much do they love him, and so necessary is he to his people, that a hint of going is enough to throw them into alarm, and induce them to cry, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me." But the motion is designed to show the power of prayer. "The king is held in the galleries." "I held him and would not let him go." "The violent take it by force." The might of earth and hell cannot restrain God, but prayer can. Two blind men, begging by the way-side, hearing that he was passing by, cried, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us." The multitude deemed them offensive interrupters, and ordered them to hold their peace. But Jesus stood still, and commanded them to be brought —The sun in nature once stood still to enable Joshua to finish his victory: and now a much nobler Being cannot take another step till he has paused, and heard, and relieved the tale of distress. When God, provoked by the idolatry of the Jews at Horeb, threatened to destroy them, Moses interposed, and held back his arm; and Omnipotence itself said, "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." Who would not value prayer!

What an efficiency does it exert! With God all things are possible—and prayer has power with God!

But the reason seems as strange as the request—Let me go, "for the day breaketh." What are the distinctions of time to him? Is it not the same to the Lord whether he is with his people by night or by day! "Darkness and light are both alike to him." First, the reason may respect the angel's unwillingness that any should be spectators of the scene. And so it tells us to avoid religious notice; and not, like the Pharisees, pray to be seen of men—"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." When we enter our closet we are not to leave it open, but to shut to the door. But, secondly, the reason rather refers to Jacob and his circumstances—"The morning comes, and we must separate for thy sake—Thou must pursue thy journey; thy cattle, servants, and family will require thy presence and aid." Religion is not to call us off from our relative duties, or even secular business. Every thing is beautiful in its season. We must sometimes exercise even spiritual self-denial. The privileges of the Sabbath must give place to the trials of the week. It would be more pleasing to continue an hour longer in retirement, reading the Scripture, with meditation and prayer; but the calls of the household and the claims of our callings bid us break off—And we must "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

JUNE 8.

"*And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said Jacob.*"—Gen. xxxii. 26, 27.

Jacob now, if not before, began to know who his antagonist was; and is therefore unwilling to separate without a blessing. He looks for a blessing from one that had opposed him, struggled with him, and disjointed his thigh. So must we "turn to him that smiteth" us, and from the very hand that wounds seek all our relief and deliverance. "Come," says the Church, "and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." The blessing of the Lord maketh rich. It can do all things for us. Creatures can only wish us a blessing, but he commands and imparts it: and when he blesses none can reverse it.

Jacob uses no ceremony, but in reply to the demand, "Let me go," abruptly says, "I will not—except thou bless me." Was this a fit answer for a servant to his Lord and Master? When we have a promise which gives us a hold of him, we are to put him in remembrance, to plead with him, and to refuse to take any denial. There is nothing more pleasing to him than this holy violence: he loves to see us while trusting in his faithful Word, disregarding the discouragements of his Providence. The woman of Canaan was sorely tried, first by his silence, then by his seeming exclusion and contempt of her—but she persevered in her application, and was more than successful. "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And when God had threatened not to go with the people, was he offended with Moses, who said, I will not stir a step further without thy presence! No; but he yielded, and said, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Prayer is nothing without earnestness and resolution. We ask and have not, because we ask amiss; we pour forth words, but leave the heart behind. How can we expect that God should regard supplications with which we are unaffected ourselves! "If," says Bishop Hopkins, "the arrow of prayer is to enter heaven, we must draw it from a soul full bent." This is what Paul means by "praying with all prayer." He, the very same Being, who here taught Jacob importunity in prayer, teaches us also at this moment the value and necessity of it. "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"—"Never man spake like this man."

Jacob specifies nothing in particular, but only insists upon a blessing. His present condition however would serve to explain his immediate wish. And therefore, with a view to this, the Lord said unto him, "What is thy name?" He could not ask to gain information; but upon the same principle that we are required to confess our sins, and to spread

our wants before him in prayer: and which is not to inform a Being who is perfectly wise, but that we may be affected with our condition, and be prepared for the display of his mercy. It is we who are changed by prayer, not he: the land is not drawn to the boat, but the boat to the land—the result of the contact is the same. The Lord well knew Jacob's name, but he would know it from himself; and therefore he said, "Jacob"—"The same to whom thou saidst at Beth-el, when fleeing from the face of my brother, I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest: the same to whom thou saidst, when leaving my uncle Laban, Return to thy kindred, and I will surely do thee good." We have the same advantage in the question when we go to his mercy's door, and he asks who we are. "Lord, thou canst not be ignorant of me. I am that swearer, that Sabbath-breaker, that despiser of all that was good, whose feet thy goodness turned into the path of peace, and whose lips it taught to show forth thy praise. I am that backslider thy mercy reclaimed. I am that sufferer who called upon thee in the day of trouble, and was delivered—I have tried thee too much; and thou hast befriended me too often, not to be acquainted with all I am"—

"Dost thou ask me who I am?
Ah, my Lord, thou know'st my name!
Yet the question gives a plea,
And supports my suit with Thee.

"Thou didst once a wretch behold,
In rebellion blindly bold,
Scorn thy grace, thy power defy;
That poor rebel, Lord, was I.

"Once a sinner, near despair,
Sought thy mercy-seat by prayer;
Mercy heard and set him free,
Lord, that mercy came to me.

"Many years have pass'd since then,
Many changes I have seen,
Yet have been upheld till now;
Who could hold me up but thou?

"Thou hast help'd in ev'ry need,
This emboldens me to plead;
After so much mercy past,
Canst thou let me sink at last?"

JUNE 9.

"*And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.*"—Genesis xxxii. 28, 29.

Thus he was knighted on the field. He had two names, and both of them were gained by wrestling: the one by wrestling with his brother in the womb; the other by wrestling with the angel at Peniel. Jacob signifies a supplanter; Israel means a prince with God—And the reason of the new name was, that he had "power with God and with men, and had prevailed." That is, he had prevailed with God, and this was an assurance that he would prevail with man—his brother Esau, and every other foe. These go together. If God refuses to hear us, creatures will help in vain; and if God be for us, who can be against us! "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." How much is it our interest to secure *his* favour who has all events at his disposal, and every heart under his control! Yet some, to engage the friendship of mortals, will offend and provoke him who can turn the wisdom of the wisest into foolishness, and the strength of the strongest into weakness.

We can hardly wonder that Jacob asked and said, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." Yet it appears to have been more curious than wise. There is much of this tendency in us all; and it is a proof of our depravity, that we are equally disposed to neglect what is plain and useful, and to pry into things which we have not seen, and which, if discovered, could be of little avail to us. This is a world of action rather than of science. The humblest Christian will know more in a moment after death than the most laborious research can acquire now in months and years. The Scripture therefore never indulges a vain curiosity that would draw us off from the one thing needful. Instead of gratifying Peter when he inquired after the destiny of John, our Saviour rebuked him: "What is that to thee! Follow thou me." And when the Apostles would become students of prophecy; and asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" he said unto them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." He therefore here said unto Jacob, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name! And he blessed him there." This furnishes us with an opportunity to remark two things. The first regards our infirmities in prayer. We often know not what we ask. The second, God's method in answering us. He grants us while he denies. If he refuses us, he gives us something better in exchange, something better in itself, and better also for us. It is better to prepare us for his coming at any time, or in any way, than to inform us of it. It is better to make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, than to make us acquainted with the nature of it. With regard to the thorn in the flesh, the Apostle was more than satisfied with the manner in which his prayer for the removal of it was answered, when, though it continued, he had the assurance of all-sufficient grace under it, and that the Saviour's strength should be made perfect in his weakness—"Most gladly therefore," says he, "will I glory in my in-

firmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He withholds abundance, but he teaches and enables us to be content with such things as we have. Let us leave ourselves to his wisdom and goodness; a wisdom that is infinite, a goodness that spared not his own Son. He would not tell Jacob his name —but he blessed him there.

JUNE 10.

"*And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*"—Gen. xxxii. 30—32.

HERE we have some of the immediate consequences of this singular event. It is obvious that Jacob apprehended the personage to be Divine. Hence he wonders at his preservation. Human nature is weak, and can only bear a degree of impression. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: and "no man," said God himself to Moses, "can see my face and live." Jacob therefore could not have seen him face to face, unless in the human form which he had assumed. Thus in the gospel God is manifest in the flesh. And thus through the veil, that is to say his flesh, we are not only saved, but shall have communion with him for ever. Jacob's humility also filled him with surprise, that he should have been not only so supported, but so signalized and dignified above all mankind. When we are in a proper frame of mind, divine favours abase as well as encourage.

That the event might not be forgotten, he calls the place by a new name, significant of the manifestation. For the same reason after a deliverance, Samuel had set up a stone, and called it Ebenezer. And Joseph and Moses had given their children names that would serve to recall their trials and their mercies. Nothing can affect us any longer than it is in our thoughts; we should therefore be careful that we forget not all his benefits. Our gratitude and our confidence depend on remembrance.

Jacob knew that the best way to glorify God is to serve him in the condition and circumstances wherein we are placed. He therefore is not idle; but as soon as the divine visitant had left him, he went forward, hastening to join his household, and to perform the duties of the husband, the father, the master, and to prepare for the expected interview. But as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. He could not have travelled at all unless he who had lamed him had re-jointed him. Yet if not some pain, some weakness was left; and he limped for life. There was doubtless a contraction of the muscle or tendon, for it is said, "therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew that shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the *sinew that shrank*." Was this refusal founded in a superstitious conceit? It was rather the consequence of a divine appointment, analogous to a ceremonial and sensible dispensation of religion; or the disuse resulted from the veneration his posterity entertained for the patriarch, and their concern to memorialize this astonishing occurrence. It would be saying, Our father trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver him—Say not to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.

But what a night was here! What a morning was here! With what confidence and peace would he now go forward, assured of a safe and pleasant meeting with his brother, and that goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life! And oh! what a relation would he have to communicate to his company as soon as he had overtaken them! They would wonder to see him halting as he approached; but they would marvel far more when he had told them of all that had happened unto him—of his wrestling! and of his success!

And how much shall we have to announce to our company who have crossed the river before us, and are waiting to receive us into everlasting habitations, when we have reached them, not in a yet unfinished and trying journey, but at home, in the rest that remains for the people of God!

> "There, on a green and flowery mount,
> Our weary souls shall sit;
> And with transporting joys recount
> The labours of our feet."

JUNE 11.

"*And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.*"—Zech. xiii. 3.

As in money transactions the sterling coin gives rise to the counterfeit, so in religious concerns, reality is followed by hypocrisy. From the beginning there were in Israel true prophets. Hence also there were false ones, wearing the attire, and assuming the manners of God's own servants; pretending to communications which they had never received; exercising and encouraging idolatry; and crying, Peace, peace, when there was no peace. When therefore God intended mercy to the country, he engages to sweep away

from the earth these emissaries of the devil, and plagues and curses of the human race. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and I will cause the prophets, and the unclean spirits to pass out of the land." And so affected would the people be, and even their relations and their nearest relations, that rising above the feelings of nature, they would themselves execute the judgment threatened: "And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth." This would be very trying to flesh and blood; but we are to love God supremely, and creatures only in subordination to him. And this is no more than Moses required: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people." It is no more than Levi performed in the slaughter of the idolaters in the camp at Horeb: "He said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children." How unlike this was the conduct of Eli, who when his sons made themselves vile, restrained them not, but only gave them a gentle rebuke! And what can we think of those parents who connive at the delinquencies of their children: and instead of opposing them with the authority and influence they possess, can rather cherish their inclinations, and accompany their steps? "He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

As the words from the immediately preceding and following context are allowed to refer to the evangelical dispensation, some have derived an argument from them in favour of compulsion and persecution in religion. But the Gospel sanctions nothing of this. When James and John would have called for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, the greatest schismatics of the age, and who had refused him a night's lodging, our Lord rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Some therefore have solved the difficulty by applying the prophecy exclusively to the conversion of the Jews; and supposing that when they become Christians they will at first act according to their former usages, just as at the beginning of the Gospel they for a while strove to bring in with Christ. circumcision, and the observance of meats and seasons. But the conjecture is improbable; and the confinement of the words to this people is groundless. The meaning is—that effects are here put for principles—Christians should not indeed act in the same manner, but have the same zeal the pious Jews had when of old they showed themselves on the Lord's side, and obeyed his commands, however expensive or painful the service—they should display the most determined firmness and fidelity in opposing error, and in spreading divine truth—holding nothing dear but the glory of God their Saviour—and forsaking all they have to be his disciples. It is therefore another of the many instances in the Old Testament, in which things Christian are expressed by Jewish allusions. The Prophets could only use their own language, and employ their own ideas and terms, even when speaking of another and a future dispensation. Nothing therefore can be more unwise, than to build opinions and expectations upon so weak a foundation as the names they often give to persons, places, and objects taken from their own economy. Surely if a Jewish prophecy or promise be allowed to refer to Christian times, influences, and blessings, the phraseologies in which it is announced should be taken, not in a Jewish, but in a Christian interpretation. Admit the reverse, and we should kill people, and think we did God service from the words before us; and fetch a thousand absurdities from other passages also.

JUNE 12.

"*That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*"—2 Cor. i. 4.

The Apostle mentions this as the purpose for which God had comforted him and his companions in all *their* tribulation. This is very instructive and edifying. We see the *aim* of God in the favours he confers upon us. He means them not to terminate in ourselves, but to extend to others, like the streams which flow on and turn mill after mill, and refresh and fertilize meadow after meadow. We are not the proprietors, but only the stewards of the manifold grace of God: and we are to consider ourselves debtors, not only to him, but to our fellow-creatures. If we are rich in this world's goods, we are to be ready to distribute. If we are enlightened, we are to arise and shine. If we are converted, we are to strengthen our brethren—and if we are comforted, we are to be comforters.

We also see how the Lord employs human instrumentality. He is the God of all com

fort; but though he is the source, we are the mediums. He could dispense with our services, but he wisely employs them; as he thereby secures our own improvement; promotes brotherly love; unites the giver to the receiver by pity, and the receiver to the giver by gratitude; shows us that there is a connexion between all ranks and degrees in society; that there is no such thing as independence; that every man has something to receive to teach him humility, and that every man has something to impart to keep him from discouragement. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

We therefore learn also, how free our minds should be from that selfishness which is satisfied with personal advantage and enjoyment. "Look not," says the Apostle, "every man to his own things, but every man also on the things of others." And how well does he exemplify his own admonition! He delights in the thought that the crown of righteousness was secured for others as well as for himself. He wishes that all his hearers had all his blessedness without his bonds. And we here see how he prized the consolations he had enjoyed, not because he had been comforted by them in his sufferings, but because they would render him useful to others who are in any trouble.

Such as are "in any trouble" have peculiar claims upon us; and we are "*able* to comfort them with those comforts wherewith we ourselves have been comforted of God," three ways. First, by excitement—They dispose and stir us up to exertion and communication. Fear unnerves: despondence makes us sluggish: and the mourner sitteth alone and keeps silence, like the stricken deer that leaves the herd. But divine consolation enlivens, actuates, and discovers itself: and the language of the happy receiver is; "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled by my tongue." Silence would be enjoined in vain—"If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out." "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard." Secondly, by qualification. The heart teacheth the lips. They can speak, in dealing with others, more surely, more earnestly, more suitably, more wisely. Having laboured and been heavy laden themselves, they can speak a word in season to him that is weary. Having found relief themselves, they can lead others to the same place of succour. Thirdly, by example. If nothing were said in words, the fact itself would address others; and evince what can be done, in showing what has been done. Here is actual experience. Here are proofs that the Lord does not leave his people comfortless; that he is a very present help in trouble; that his grace is equally free and powerful, that none who seek it shall be disappointed, and none confounded that trust in it. When the Lord's people sustain losses in their endearments, and yet say, The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord: when they receive the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: when, though walking in the valley of the shadow of death, they fear no evil, but rejoice in hope of the glory of God; how many thank God and take courage!

JUNE 13.

"*Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?*"—Micah ii. 7.

They do evil and injury to many. Thousands will curse for ever the hour they became acquainted with the Scriptures; for they derive from them only an increase of guilt and of condemnation. But this is not the effect of design or of natural tendency in them; for the Bible is intended and adapted to do us good only; but is the accidental result of depravity: and therefore it is confined to those who pervert it, abuse it, and neglect it; and thus turn the blessing into a curse. But his words do good to him that walketh uprightly. They do good indeed to others, and are the means of the conversion of sinners. But the prophet is not speaking of what the Scriptures do in bringing us into a religious state, but of the benefit they render us when we are in it. Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower, does not explain *how* the ground is *made* good—this he has done in other places; but of the effect of the seed in bringing forth thirty, sixty, or one hundred fold, when falling where it is *already* good—in distinction from its unprofitableness when uniting with the way-side, and the stony and thorny soil. The author of the origin of the rain is another question; but the Apostle is speaking only of its influence according to the subject imbibing it, when he says, that coming upon the garden it bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, and receives a blessing from God: but in other places it calls forth weeds, and thorns, and briers, which are nigh unto cursing, and whose end is to be burned. The Word of God must operate according to the principles and dispositions it finds in us. If it be food, it is nothing to the dead but to the living: it is milk for babes, and strong meat for men. If it be a rule, the benefit is only to them that

walk by it. And we are never in so suitable a state to be benefited by it as when conscience is awake, and we are sincerely desirous of knowing the will of God, and are resolved to follow it, whatever difficulties may lie in the way. Hence says James, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls." And thus Peter also. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings, as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

For we are not to expect that his words will do us good mechanically, that is, without our consciousness or activity; or that they will act in us as physical causes operate in the body, where the concoction of the food, and the circulation of the fluids go on, when we are asleep, as well as when we are awake, being independent of our volitions and thoughts. The Scriptures can only affect us morally, in a way of motive, in the exercises of the mind, and in the use of the means which God has appointed. This does not supersede divine influence, but is the way in which it works, and in which alone we are *authorized* to look for it. If God's words are to do us good, we must read them—we must hear them—we must believe them—we must understand them—we must reflect upon them—we must speak of them—we must pray over them. But what is the benefit they will then do us? It would be endless to describe it. They are profitable unto all things.

They will do us good in a way of information. And for the soul to be without knowledge it is not good. But there is no knowledge like that which is derived from the Scriptures. It is so clear, so full, so important, so blessed—it giveth life to them that have it—

> "When once it enters to the mind,
> It spreads such light abroad,
> The meanest souls instruction find,
> And raise their thoughts to God."

What an advantage, in every duty, in every perplexity, to be able to go to these lively oracles, to learn what God the Lord has to say concerning us; and to hear a voice saying, This is the way, walk ye in it!

They will do us good in a way of excitement. We often grow dull and formal in religion. We have a name that we live, but are dead; or the things that remain are ready to die. But when our souls cleave unto the dust, he quickens us according to his word; and the effect endears it and enables us to remember it: "I will never forget thy precepts; for with them thou hast quickened me."

They will do us good in a way of rebuke. If they deal truly with us—and they will never flatter; they will—they must frequently reprove us. And if we are concerned for our real welfare, we shall not esteem them our enemy, because they tell us the truth. We shall cordially say, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend;" and falling in with their wholesome severity, we shall fall upon our knees and pray, Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. How improper is it to limit the benefit of the word to encouragement; and to suppose that we have never a *good* opportunity, as the phrase is, when we attend upon it, unless it comforts us! What a blessing is it to be humbled, to be emptied of self, to see more of our own weakness and vileness, and to cry mightily at the foot of the cross, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Not that we undervalue comfort. The joy of the Lord is our strength; and these words he has spoken unto us, that his joy may be in us, and that our joy may be full. They therefore do us good, by inspiring us with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. They relieve the wearied, oppressed with a sense of grief and unworthiness, by leading them to the Lamb of God, and giving them access with confidence, by the faith of him. They tell us what we are to do with trouble; and they tell us what trouble is to do for us. Ah! says the bereaved and desolate, unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction. Ah! says the dying, I will fear no evil; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

We talk of benefactors! of a Howard; of a Thornton! What good has the Bible done! What millions has it blessed! And in what countless instances has it blessed each of them! How much do I owe it! Bless the Lord, O my soul. Thanks be unto God fo his unspeakable gift; and let the whole eart. be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen.

JUNE 14.

"*Adam, where art thou?*"—Gen. iii. 9.

The question regards not so much the place as the state in which Adam now was. And it is not to be considered as indicating any proof of ignorance; for who can hide himself from the view of Omniscience? But it implies several things the result of knowledge.

It is the expression of surprise—"Adam, where art thou?" As if he had said, "Before, when I came, thou wert ready to meet me; and my presence was thy delight. What in so short a space of time has produced this change? What have I done to cause this alienation and flight from me?" If this seems an unbecoming representation of God, let it be remembered that he has himself furnished it—"Be astonished, hearers, at this." "What could have been done more to my vineyard

that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" He cannot indeed be imposed upon, but he has *a right* to complain; and speaks according to the equity of the case. "Adam, where art thou?"

It is the language of upbraiding. "Is this the return thou hast made for all the favours with which I have indulged thee? Is this the use thou hast made of the noble faculties with which I have endowed and ennobled thee? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Is this acting the part of a faithful steward toward his proprietor? of a dutiful child towards a good father? of an obedient servant towards the best of masters? Did I envy thy welfare or wish to abridge thy happiness? I only forbad thee one tree in all the garden; and even this was forbidden for thy trial, and with a view to thy honour and reward."

It is the lamentation of pity. He is not only the just God, but the Saviour: he is not only righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, but full of compassion and slow to anger. As, when our Lord, condemned by the Pharisees for healing the withered arm on the Sabbath-day, looked round upon his audience "with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts;" and as, when he looked upon the backsliding Peter, and dissolved him into godly sorrow, there was not only surprise and upbraiding in the glance, but mercy and readiness to forgive: so here, in the voice that addressed Adam, there was not only alarm, but tenderness; not only abhorrence of the crime, but pity for the criminal—"Poor Adam, what hast thou done? What misery hast thou brought upon thyself! I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. How shall I give thee up? Adam, *where* art thou?"

But the question admits of a universal application; and we should bring it home to ourselves; and for three reasons. First, because of the relation there is between Adam and ourselves. There is no other creature with whom we are so intimately and influentially connected. He was the father and the natural head, and he was the representative and the federal head of the whole human race. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." "By one man's offence death reigned by one." "In Adam all die." Secondly, because by personal transgression we bring ourselves into the same state. All sin is the same in its nature and tendency. We sin and expose ourselves to danger—Fear treads on the heels of guilt—Dread produces aversion—And we try to secure ourselves instead of repairing to his feet, and imploring mercy. In one respect we are worse than Adam. He, after the first act of iniquity, could not look God in the face; while we go on still in our trespasses; often daringly enter his presence and stand before him in his worship; and seem to defy rather than endeavour to elude him—So men are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!—Thirdly, because the inquiry may lead us to examine our state, and apprehend our doom. And what a blessing is it to be apprized of our danger while it is in our power to escape! Would not a man have reason to be thankful, if a person should break his slumber, however pleasing, while sleeping in a house just ready to bury him in the ruins? Conviction of sin may be painful, but it is salutary, it is necessary. Without a consciousness of the disease, a remedy will neither be valued or applied—"They that be whole need not the physician, but they that are sick." It was a blessed cry in the jailer, when he exclaimed, "What must I do to be saved?" It secured the direction and the promise; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Nothing hinders our full relief as sinners by the Gospel but our ignorant pride in refusing to submit ourselves to the righteousness which is of God. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

JUNE 15.

"*Ye are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*"—1 Peter ii. 25.

For they *were* as sheep going astray—This was their state by nature. But *now* they are in a state of grace. And two things are observed with regard to it. First, they enter it by a return—Ye are *returned*. Grace never leaves us as it finds us. It makes us the subjects of a change—not a change from one class of opinions to another, or from one denomination to another—not a change from mere gross vices to moral duties; but a change of mind, of heart, and of life; and which embodies the various representations given of it in the Scriptures. It is a turning from darkness to light, and the power of Satan unto God. It is the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is a new birth, a new creation. The work, though always essentially the same, differs in various individuals. The means also by which it is produced are not the same in all instances. In general, it is accomplished by the preaching of the word; but sometimes it is effected by reading the Scriptures, by a good book, by pious conversation, by affliction—"Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."

But let us never suppose that the return is owing to himself. It is supposed the Apostle designed to express this by the form of his expression. It is in the passive voice—not ye—returned, but ye *are* returned—that is, as if he had said, ye have been caused to return. We would not however found a doctrine of such importance on a mere gram

maticism. The truth is expressly asserted. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Secondly, this return brings them to Christ —"Ye are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." He is the personage spoken of; and how well does he deserve the titles—But observe, the grand thing in religion is our being brought to *Christ*. Therefore he himself said, "Come unto *me*:" "Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto *me*." As it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell, "to him," it is said, "shall men come." "To him shall the gathering of the people be." It is with him we have to do immediately in the concerns of the soul. We want a mediator between God and us; but we want no mediator between Christ and us—To him we must come as we are. "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

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Christians! what gratitude becomes you! Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Ye were in bondage, but are now in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Ye were destitute of all spiritual good, but are now blessed with all spiritual blessings. How should your obligation to such infinite goodness be discharged! By a few languid emotions or formal acknowledgments! A soul redeemed demands a life of praise.

Christians! what confidence, what joy becomes you! All hail, ye highly favoured of the Lord—"Ye *were* as sheep going astray, but are *now* returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of souls"—You are returned unto One who loved you from eternity, and always bore you in his heart—You are returned to one who saved you from a thousand dangers, and preserved you by his providence till he called you by his grace—You are returned to one whose power is Almighty, whose heart is made of tenderness, who never leaves you, never slumbers nor sleeps—You are returned to one who, lest any hurt you, keeps you night and day, and has said, My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand—You are returned to one who will feed his flock *like* a shepherd; who will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young—who will make you to lie down in green pastures, and feed you beside the still waters, and restore your souls, and lead you in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake. Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil, for he will be with you his rod and his staff will comfort you. And not only so, but he will bring you into Immanuel's land and the heavenly places, where the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed you, and lead you to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.

JUNE 16.

"*I was wounded in the house of my friends.*" Zech. xiii. 6.

THIS seems literally the complaint of a false prophet, who had been punished and removed from his office. We cannot easily perceive the relation between the treatment of such a man and the suffering of the Saviour. And yet the words both immediately preceding and following can scarcely leave a doubt of a reference to him. And of him the complaint is true in every respect. True with regard to the treatment he met with from the Jews. He came to his own, and his own received him not; but vilified and scourged him; crowned him with thorns, and nailed him to the tree. True with regard to his treatment from his own Apostles. One of them betrayed him with a kiss; another denied him with oaths and cursing; and all forsook him and fled—He looked for some to take pity and there was none, and for comforters but he found none. True with regard to the professors of his religion in all ages. The world is the house of his enemies. There his day is profaned, his laws trangressed, his name blasphemed, his truth denied, and his followers contemned—There we look for nothing else; and though we censure and condemn, we feel no surprise. But the Church is the house of his friends: so he calls them; and it is their honour and privilege to be such—yet here, even here, where he only reckons upon behaviour becoming the relation, he is often dishonoured and injured—"This *is* a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation."

But what is the conduct by which he is aggrieved? It is negligent conduct—when they disregard the means of grace and the institutions of religion. These he has established. He has commanded us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together He has promised to come unto us and bless us in all places where his name is recorded. What then can be more trying than to show how little we regard his authority, or value his presence? and to suffer trifles to keep us from our engagements with him that would not detain us from an appointment with any of our fellow-creatures! It is selfish conduct —when we cannot deny ourselves, or make any sacrifices for the relief of his members, and the support and spread of his cause; though we are often praying that his kingdom

may come, and that his word may have free course and be glorified. It is distrustful conduct—nothing hurts us more than a want of confidence, especially after long intimacy and tried fidelity. He is truth itself, and loves to see us taking him at his word, and depending upon his promises as firmer than heaven and earth. Nothing in a friend atones for distance and concealment, and our learning things not by communication but by event. The Lord loves to be consulted; and when we venture to act without taking counsel of him, and bring ourselves into difficulties and embarrassments, he may well chide us—"You should have committed your way unto me." Hast thou not procured this unto thyself? It is timid conduct—when instead of going forth to him without the camp we are ashamed of him and of his words; when instead of being bold as a lion we shrink back or turn aside in the path of duty, at every intimation of danger. The fear of man bringeth a snare. But perfect love casteth out fear. It is gloomy conduct—when we walk mournfully before the Lord, and hang down our heads like a bulrush, and sink in the day of adversity. We then depreciate and misrepresent his religion, and lead people to think it is a course of cheerlessness and melancholy. Whereas, by learning in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content; and in every thing giving thanks; and rejoicing evermore; we speak well of his name, we recommend his service, we invite others to seek him with us. It is unholy conduct—when instead of putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, and constraining others to glorify God by our good works which they behold; we cause, by our miscarriages and falls, the way of truth to be evil spoken of, and the adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme. Woe to the world because of offences. They harden the wicked; scandalize the weak; distress the strong; weaken the hands of his servants; and vex and grieve his Holy Spirit. And though he will not cast away his people whom he foreknew, their backslidings shall reprove them, and he will make them know that it is not only an evil but a bitter thing to forsake him. This is the law of the house: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Thus, because Moses and Aaron did not sanctify him at the rock, he would not suffer them to go over Jordan. And though he put away David's sin in the guilt of it, yet the effects of it attended him through life. And if we turn from his history to his experience, in the fifty-first Psalm, we shall see, that in addition to distressing events without, he had anguish enough within to induce him ever after to pray, Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.

But while fear makes us prayerful, let ingenuousness make us penitent. Let us bewail the ingratitude and vileness of our conduct towards such a benefactor. Let us hear him say—Did not I suffer enough while on earth? Must I now not only be crucified afresh and put to an open shame among others; but be wounded in the house of my friends? Who when rich for thy sake became poor? By whose blood wast thou redeemed? In whose righteousness art thou accepted? What have I not done for thee? And what have I not engaged to do? Have I not promised to guide thee in all thy ways? To keep thee in all thy dangers? To supply all thy wants? To make all things work together for thy good? And to receive thee at death to myself, that where I am thou mayest be also? ——Is this thy kindness to thy Friend?"

"Forgive my guilt, O Prince of peace,
I'll wound my God no more;
Hence from my heart, my sins, begone,
For Jesus I adore."

JUNE 17.

"*And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went towards Haran.*"—Gen. xxviii. 10.

Esau's anger was fierce against Jacob for having deprived him of his father's blessing. His mother therefore advised him to flee to her brother Laban, and tarry with him a few days; "until," said she, "thy brother's fury turn away, and he forget that which thou hast done to him;" clearly intimating that his concern would be of short duration, and that levity would soon extinguish resentment. Whence we may learn that carnal men, for such this profane person strikingly represents, can easily resign what a believer would not part with for a thousand worlds—The blessing of his heavenly Father.

Dismissed by Isaac with admonition and prayer, "Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran." Though the simplicity and manners of the age rendered travelling less formidable than it appears to persons unaccustomed to it now, yet the journey must have been very trying to Jacob —The distance was great—he was parting with his parents—he was young—he had been tenderly brought up, having been the favourite of Rebecca—he had no beast to carry him—he had no servant to attend him —no guide to direct him—no guard to protect him—no companion to cheer him by communion. Thus he goes forward solitary and pensive, ruminating upon his sad condition, and conflicting with those apprehensions which always attend untried and uncertain

events. And "he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set." The road he travelled, if it might be called a road, was in many places savage and dreary; uninhabited of men, and infested with wild beasts, which would now be roving abroad: "Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens." Jacob's safety therefore prevents his going onward till the morning. Here therefore he must repose. But what will he do for lodgings? There is no habitation near him. And for want of materials he cannot pitch a tent. He is therefore obliged to expose his body to the moist air of the night: the sky is his tester; the darkness his curtain; the earth his bed: "and he took the stones of that place, and put them for his pillow, and lay down in that place to sleep." And *could* he sleep in such a condition? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet; and he does not require delicate accommodations—But this was not all. He hereby showed his inward serenity and confidence. The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion. The Lord keeps in perfect peace the mind that is stayed upon him. David, when the rebellion of his son raged around him, said, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." And Peter, the night before his intended execution, was sleeping so soundly between the soldiers, that the angel, to awake him, was compelled to strike him. How happy in trouble, and how safe in jeopardy are those who have an all-sufficient Jehovah to watch over them, and keep them by day and by night!

There cannot be a better evidence of our belonging to God than the resignation of ourselves to him in a way of providence. "How may I know I do so?" We answer, by acquiescing in his dispensations, and accommodating yourselves to events. We find no murmuring in Jacob, notwithstanding the trying circumstances he was in. The hope of an agreeable scene for the future reconciled him to his hard condition for the present. So should it be with us while we are travelling, not to Haran, but to heaven; not to the house of a cruel Laban, but to the dwelling of a gracious Saviour. He will give us every thing necessary for our journey, and a welcome and blessed reception at the end of it. It becomes us therefore in patience to possess our souls, and to go on our way rejoicing.

Jacob sleeps, but his heart waketh. It would be unwarrantable to conclude that Jacob had held no intercourse with God during his journey. We have every reason to suppose that what he had been reflecting upon during the day continued to occupy and impress his thoughts at night; and therefore that God took advantage of it in dealing with him. And though there was something extraordinary in the affair before us, yet we are persuaded that if we were more with God when we are awake, we should be more with God when we are asleep—for "a dream cometh through the multitude of business."

Jacob dreamed. The generality of dreams are frivolous and vain; and it is strange that many good people should lay such stress upon them as they often do. But the circumstances of Jacob's dream are worthy our attention; because they have the signature of God upon them. Observe what was

Seen. "Behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." Was this designed to intimate the providence of God as observing all things, and keeping up a perpetual correspondence between heaven and earth? Rather read the language of our Saviour to Nathanael: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Here is the true meaning of the ladder. And why should this be deemed unlikely? Was not he always the consolation of Israel? Here were his divinity and humanity; his humiliation, and his exaltation; the one extending to earth, the other to heaven. He was a figure of the medium of communications between the upper and the lower world. He is the mediator between God and man. Every blessing comes to us through his interposition; and therefore the ministry of angels. Hence, "Behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." For through him these celestial beings "are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation." They rejoice when they are converted; they encamp round about them in their dangers, and deliver them; they attend their worshipping assemblies; and at last convey their departing spirits into Abraham's bosom. These angels did not go up and down the ladder after the manner of persons amusing themselves: they ascended to receive their orders, and descended to execute them. Though they excel in strength, they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. He says to one, Go, and he goeth; to another Come, and he cometh: and it is his pleasure they regard, and not the nature of the employment; and if two of them were summoned into his presence, and ordered, the one to govern an empire, and the other to show some Hagar a well, they would repair to their posts with equal readiness and delight—May his will be done on earth as it is in heaven! What do we read further? "And, behold, the Lord stood above it."

Standing was a posture of attention—He was looking down to observe his weary-worn pilgrim sleeping at the foot of the ladder, and every way ready to appear for him. Observe therefore what was

Heard. God repeats the covenant made with his father, and ratifies it to himself, assuring him that the country in which he was now reposing should be given to him and his posterity for a possession; that his offspring should be numerous and illustrious; and that one of his descendants should prove a benefactor to all mankind: "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." But God is a very present help in trouble; he therefore accommodates his promise to his present situation and circumstances: "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." He was alone, and God engages to be with him—He was exposed, and God engages to keep him—He was an exile, and God engages to bring him home again—And all this issuing from faithfulness itself, and more to be relied on than the continuance of heaven and earth! What could Jacob desire more?

And what was the impression the whole made upon him? "Then Jacob awoke"—Perhaps it was a short sleep, but it was long enough. By the sweet dream attending it he learned what he was ignorant of before he slumbered; namely, that God was there—And he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." How strikingly does this ignorance represent, first, the ignorance of mankind in general. God is everywhere. He is about their path and their lying down—But they do not know, they do not consider, they do not realize it. If they did, how differently would they speak, and act, and live! Secondly, the ignorance of the people of God themselves. How prone are they to forget their privileges and principles; and to imagine they are left of God in particular situations and difficulties. But they cannot be left, especially in their afflictions: for he has not only said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee—but "I will be with thee in trouble"—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Yet after all this, divine manifestations often surprise us; and we wonder where we should only praise.

JUNE 18.

"*And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*"—Gen. xxviii. 17.

Such was the exclamation of Jacob after his pleasing dream; when he awoke from sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.

It shows us that intercourse with God, instead of favouring levity of mind, produces the most serious impressions. The man that felt no apprehension in the evening at lying down in the open air, enveloped in darkness and surrounded with danger, is afraid in the morning—at what? The thought of a present Deity. This was not indeed a slavish terrifying dread, like that of Belshazzar, when he saw the handwriting upon the wall, when the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another: but it was reverence and godly fear; such as Peter and Isaiah and Job felt, at the manifestations of the divine glory; and such as the angels feel when they veil their faces before him. Let this rectify the mistake of those who imagine that the doctrines of grace and the work of the Spirit lead people to a kind of careless and presumptuous freedom with God. The experience of every believer gives the lie to this. The nearer he draws to God's seat, and the more intimately he deals with him, the more he sees of his perfections, and the more he feels his own vanity and vileness. And the Scripture assures us that God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

Wherever God meets with his people, that place deserves to be considered as his house. This is conformable to his own language: "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Observe also our Saviour's conversation with the woman of Samaria. Her countrymen supposed that God must be preferably, if not exclusively worshipped on Gerizim; while the Jews thought the same of Jerusalem: but he reminded her that the worship of God did not derive its excellency or acceptableness from locality: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

God seldom receives any thing but formality from those worshippers, whose bigoted attachment to any particular mode or building

leads them to say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are *we*." Nothing makes a people dear to God but their resemblance of him; and nothing makes any place sacred but the divine presence—there can be no sanctity in wood and stone—"*This*," says Jacob, of the bare ground on which he had been lying, having seen and heard God there; "*this* is none other than the *house of God*." Our Lord prayed and preached in private dwellings; in the open air; on the side of a mountain; by the way-side; and from a fishing-boat, as well as in the synagogue and temple. So did his Apostles. It was not till the end of the third century that Christians had edifices expressly reared for their public worship. In three cases this remark may encourage us. First, when by accident, disease, relative affliction, or civil engagement, we are detained from the courts of the Lord. If the heart be there, and we are unavoidably prevented, the Lord will make up the loss, and we shall see his power and glory *as* we have seen him in the sanctuary. Secondly, if Providence should fix our station where we have little or no advantage from the privileges of God's house. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, though in exile, and far from the usual appendages of the Sabbath. "I will be," says God, "a little sanctuary to them in the midst of the heathen." Thirdly, in the intervals of public worship. We cannot be always, or very frequently in the temple; but we may render every object and every event a preacher; and—

> "Where'er we seek him he is found,
> And every place is holy ground."

Again. The experience of good men even here sometimes approximates them to the world of glory. Jacob saw that he was not in heaven, but in such communion and with such manifestations, he thought it could not be far off—"This," says he, "is none other than the *gate of heaven*." Carnal men think of heaven (if ever they think of it at all) as a place far off, and to be reached by ascending up thousands of miles through the skies. But, says our Saviour, "the kingdom of God is nigh you. The kingdom of heaven is within you." And the believer's present acquaintance with it and participations of it convince him that heaven is a state rather than a place—He is the first-fruits of the Spirit, the earnest of inheritance—He has come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and has everlasting life. And we confine not this to some extraordinary enjoyments in his private and public devotional engagements—in tribulation we have seen him "joyful in glory;" and have heard him "shout aloud upon his bed" of painful sickness, and dying anguish.

Finally, the house of God and the gate of heaven are related to each other; and therefore they are well mentioned together. Not that the connexion between them is inseparable; or that all those who attend the one will enter the other—Far from it. To some the house of God will be the gate of hell, and open to them a passage into greater misery; and the preaching of the Word will prove the savour of death unto death. But this is the effect of perversion or misimprovement. The means of grace are designed and adapted to awaken and secure our attention to the things which belong to our peace. In the house of God many of his people are converted; and all are comforted, improved, and established. To them the Sabbath is an emblem of, and a preparation for the rest that remains when the busy week of life is over. They are here learning and loving the song they will sing for ever. The temple below only precedes and introduces the temple above—Thus the pious Philip Henry would often end his "pleasant things" on the evening of the Lord's day, by saying—"Well, if this be not heaven, it must be the way to it."

JUNE 19.

"*I am Alpha and Omega.*"—Rev. i. 8.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet; and therefore stand for the commencement and termination of any concern in question—Therefore it is here added by way of explanation, "The beginning and the ending."

It is proper to observe that this is the way in which God characterizes himself: "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God"—This is very decisive. And yet the Lord Jesus applies this title to himself. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty"—We are not ignorant of the pretence of some, that God the Father is here intended; but nothing like evidence supports it; while the attempt itself betrays a concession that *if* the words were the words of our Saviour, his divinity would be established. But read again: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." And

again: "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Here *he* is undeniably the speaker; and equally is he so in our text. Now if he had been thus called only in one place, it would have been sufficient for our purpose: but the frequency of the appropriation of the title shows how necessary it is that we always entertain proper apprehensions of his greatness.

But what is the import of the title itself? First, it regards his nature, and shows the duration of it. It never began, and will never end. Hence in another place he is said to be "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And Paul holds forth this truth by comparing, or rather contrasting him with the creation—He was before the world appeared; and he will be when it is no more: Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." It is true that angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and even their glorified bodies, will be immortal. But they will not continue *like* him. They are only streams, he is the fountain of life. They are branches, he is the vine that sustains them. In him they will live, and move, and have their being for ever. If he should suspend his influence for a moment, they would return to their original nothingness—"He only," therefore, "hath immortality."

It also regards his agency—The continuance and exclusiveness of it—That he is the commencer and completer—That he is all in all—In what?

Let us look at creation. Modern science has surprisingly enlarged our conceptions of the magnitude and extent of the universe; but glorious and immense as it is—we use only the language of Scripture: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." Thus he is the first cause, and the last end of the whole.

Let us look at providence. Preservation, if it be not a continued creation, requires a continual agency—"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." "He upholdeth all things by the word of his power." How many creatures are there visible, and what myriads of myriads more, that are invisible, in the air, the water, and the earth! And the eyes of all wait upon him. He openeth his hand and satisfieth every living thing He is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. He raises them up, and brings them down, as he pleases: they fulfil his purposes, and will appear at his tribunal. Empires are formed or destroyed at his nod. All their revolutions are connected with his cause; and the kingdom and nation that will not serve him shall perish. He is the head over all things to the Church which is his body; the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

Let us look at redemption. He trod the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with him. By himself he purged our sins. When he died he said, It is finished. And by the one offering up of himself, we are assured he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. And he is not only the Alpha and Omega in obtaining eternal redemption for us, but in the application of it. He saves us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. We live in the Spirit; we walk in the Spirit; and this Spirit is "the Spirit of Christ," and derived *only* from him. The Apostle therefore calls him "the author and finisher of our faith." He is all that faith sees, lays hold of, relies upon, rejoices and glories in. Whose blood but his cleanses us from all sin? Whose righteousness but his can we mention in our approach to God? In whom alone are we free from all condemnation? He *only* lives to make intercession for us. He *only* is our advocate with the Father. In him *all* fullness dwells. Neither is there salvation in *any* other; for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. He produces also the *grace* of faith: he maintains it: he perfects it: and therefore the Apostles addressed themselves to him, saying, Lord, increase our faith. And the same, by a parity of reason, may be said of all our religious principles and dispositions. He is the author and finisher of our hope; the author and finisher of our patience; the author and finisher of our humility, our peace, our joy. Therefore on him all believers *alone* depend, and to him *alone* they ascribe the praise and glory of all they possess. "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

JUNE 20.

"*And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.*"—Exodus xvii. 5, 6.

We should learn two things from this in-

terposition. The one regards the providence of God. The other the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It should teach us to rely on the providence of God in our difficulties and straits. The trial was great—They pitched in Rephidim, and the people had no water to drink. Consider how indispensable this supply was, in a dry place, under a burning sun, and with such an immense multitude of men, women, children, and cattle! What lowings of the herds! What piercing cries of the infants! What anguish is parching thirst!—God could have led them to a place where were wells of water, or have rained down showers upon them; but this would not have been so sensible and striking a display of omnipotence, as bringing water at once by a stroke out of a rock, which, as we learn from two other passages of Scripture, was a rock of flint; and in such abundant effusions. "He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers." What a foundation for their hope in God! Yet see their unbelief. We should have thought it impossible for them, after such a proof of his almightiness and all-sufficiency, to have questioned whether he *could* deliver or relieve them: "yet they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" So it was with them. But how was it with Moses, when God had engaged to furnish the people with flesh for a month? Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." How was it with our Lord's own disciples? They had seen him from a most scanty supply feed a vast multitude, so that as distributors they had twenty-fold more in their hands when they left off than they began with: yet when they were in the boat, they began to despond, because they had but one loaf! And has not this been still more the case with us? Are we not always limiting the Holy One of Israel, and ready to say, "There is no hope," especially when the usual expedients fail us? But we should remember that nothing is too hard for the Lord; and that if he does not find a way for our release or relief, he can furnish one. Our extremity is his opportunity. He does not prevent darkness; but to the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: and it is often darkest before break of day. He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. He loves to appear to our joy, when all prospect that we should be saved is taken away. Let us remember that what is impossible to us is easy to him. Who ordered the fish to bring Peter the tribute-money? Who multiplied the widow's oil and meal? Who brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and in the evening? Who turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters?

It will readily be conceded that we are not to look for miracles now. But we are to look for him who performed them, who is a very present help in trouble, whose hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and whose ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. He has said, and the Scripture cannot be broken, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure;" and "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

But his work is perfect, his ways are judgment. We do many things to accomplish one purpose; he accomplishes many purposes by one thing. This interposition therefore not only displays the Providential care of God, and teaches us to trust in him in all difficulties and exigences; but it also furnishes an emblem of the Saviour's grace. We love not the spiritualizers of the Scripture. They give it meanings which it never had, finding facts in figures and figures in facts, just as it serves their vain fancies, till sober-minded people are tempted to think that it has no certain and fixed sense in it. But here we follow our inspired guide—"And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

JUNE 21.

"*And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*"—1 Cor. x. 4.

How was that Rock *Christ?* Not really, but typically. How was it a *spiritual* Rock? Not by substance, but by signification; not by its quality, but by its use. We should not press a metaphor beyond its lawful bounds. But the analogy in the case before us holds

With regard to the Rock *itself.* A rock is remarkable for its solidity, strength, duration, support, shelter, and shade; and so is a just and striking emblem of Christ, who is so often expressed by the name. It holds also

With regard to the *striking.* The Rock was smitten; and Christ once suffered, the just for the unjust. The Rock was smitten publicly in the sight of the elders and of the people; and Christ suffered at Jerusalem in the presence of a similar multitude. The Rock was smitten by Moses; and the law, of which he is the representative, inflicted the death of Christ: he redeemed us from

the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us. Till the Rock was thus smitten it yielded no supplies; and Christ being made perfect through suffering, became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. Who could have expected that the smiting of a Rock would have furnished a flood of living waters! It was the Lord's doing, and is marvellous in our eyes. And Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men—Which things the angels desire to look into. It also holds

With regard to the *streams*. What did these serve to express? The blood of Jesus which "is drink indeed"—The doctrines of the Gospel, whose tidings to the distressed conscience are like cold water to a thirsty soul, and afford a refreshment and satisfaction which no philosophy can furnish—The influences of the Holy Ghost, according to the promise, I will pour water upon him that is thirsty; and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:" and the invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink—This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."

One circumstance must not be overlooked. The streams not only relieved their present wants, but secured them future supplies; for it was in these, the rock followed them in their journeys, so that they were constantly refreshed by them. As long as we are in the wilderness our spiritual wants will return; but the Saviour will never leave us: and as our days so shall our strength be. Thus our condition is softened; and we can sometimes sing the Lord's song in a strange land. But soon the sun shall not light on us, nor any heat, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of water.

Let us read the Old Testament under the extensions and applications of the New. It was designed to furnish shadows of good things to come; but the body is Christ.

Let us bless *him* who was smitten that we might drink of the river of his pleasure. The rock in the wilderness was smitten unconsciously; but Jesus was exceeding sorrowful even unto death: and he knew the expensiveness of his interposition on our behalf: yet he more than consented to the condition—he delighted in the sacrifice.

"Oh," said David, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" And three of his brave followers broke through the garrison of the Philistines, and brought him a supply. But, said he, "it is the price of blood;" and he was too generous to drink what had endangered life in the procuring. Behold how *they* loved *him*. But what was their love to their sovereign, compared with the Saviour's love to us! He actually poured out his soul unto death, that we might live through him, and with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation. This is indeed the price of blood, of blood divine! Yet he is charmed to see us partake of the costly privilege!

As from the gushings of the rock there was more than a sufficiency for all the multitude; so in Jesus there is enough for all, and to spare; for it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.

As all were welcome to drink of the abundance, so none are forbidden here. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

We have met with a painting of this scene. Some were represented as pressing close to the fissures to catch the enlivening draught. Others as falling down upon their knees to drink of the bubbling flow. Fathers and mothers were eager to impart to their parched children who stretched out their eager hands and necks. Others were hastening to bear relief to the lame, the sick, the dying—It is the eagerness for relief and gratification which explains the allusion of Moses: "He made them ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." It was not oil or honey; but it was as good—it tasted as rich as oil—as sweet as honey. And did we but thirst as they did, such would be our longings after the Saviour, so precious would be a participation of his benefits, so eager should we be, not only to obtain supplies for ourselves, but to communicate them to others also.

How well do those who refuse these rich and blessed streams deserve the place where in vain they will call for a drop of water to cool their tongue! This is the condemnation—"Ye would not come unto me, that ye might have life."

JUNE 22.

"*Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them. And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.*"—Isaiah xxxvi. 1, 2.

HERE was a great danger. The enemy was powerful. He had subdued many other

countries. He was now invading Judah; and carrying every thing before him. He had already taken every strong-hold in his way, and was now come to the very gate of Jerusalem. The Lord frequently does not appear for his servants till all hope that they should be saved is taken away. Hence it has grown into a proverb, that our extremity is God's opportunity—"In the mount it shall be seen."

He does not hinder our sun from going down; but he prevents the darkness we foreboded, and at evening time it is light! Thus it was with Hezekiah.

Observe under this alarming trial what he felt. "It came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth." So Job, that example of patience, when he had heard the successive messengers of woe, "arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped." A natural hardihood, a stoical insensibility, is not patience or submission; yea, it renders the exercise of them impossible. There is no patience in bearing what we do not feel, or resignation in giving up what we do not value. The grace of God keeps us from despising the chastening of the Lord, as well as from fainting when we are rebuked of him: and afflictions only yield profit to them that are exercised thereby.

Observe also what he did. He betook himself to prayer. It was his duty, it was his privilege. It distinguished him from men of the world, who have recourse to suicide, or dissipation, or creature-assistance—God was *his* refuge and strength, a present help in trouble. "He went into the house of the Lord." No doubt he retired and poured out his soul before the Lord in his closet; but God is known in his palaces for a refuge. Hence he also sent a deputation to engage the supplications of Isaiah the prophet: "And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." This shows the sense he had of his own imperfections, and his confidence that the fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much. Nor was he disappointed.

Observe what he gained—a complete deliverance. Who ever sought the Lord in vain? How readily does he answer the cries of his people! What wonders has prayer achieved! Prayer is our best weapon—Hezekiah conquered upon his knees.

The deliverance was not only in answer to prayer, but it was foretold. "Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it." By announcing a thing so improbable, the Lord not only showed his foreknowledge, but afforded Hezekiah an immediate ground of confidence. He could have done all without promising it; but the word would prove the trial of his faith. If he believed it, his fears would be forthwith removed, and his mind be kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God.

The deliverance was also founded in a remarkable reason. The reason is two-fold. First, says he, "I will defend this city for mine own sake." The foe has been blaspheming me, as if I were one of the gods of the heathen, whose worshippers he has conquered, weak as they, and unable to save those who trust in me. But I will display my perfections, and vindicate the glory of my name. Accordingly Hezekiah had pleaded this: "Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." Secondly, I will do it "for my servant David's sake." How honourable was this to the character of the man after his own heart! A similar allusion was often made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From the beginning some were blessed for the sake of others. It was to show God's regard to righteousness; to enforce religion from its relative influence and advantages; and to prepare for a belief in the mediation of the Messiah, for whose obedience unto death all the families of the earth are blessed. The deliverance also was supernaturally accomplished: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." What a destruction was here! And what an idea does it give us of the power of these messengers of God, who excel in strength and do his commandments! How

safe and how happy are they who have the Lord of hosts on their side! If God be for us, who can be against us?

But woe to those who provoke a Being whose word arms every creature against them! What will it be "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his *mighty* angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe!"

JUNE 23.

"*Where two or three are gathered together*"—Matt. xviii. 20.

THERE are *circumstances* which are not essential to the nature, acceptance, and usefulness of divine worship. Two of these our Saviour here mentions.

The first regards *place*—"*Where*"—let it be where it will—in the sanctuary, or in the private dwelling, or in the barn, or in the field—"*Where* two or three are gathered together in my name, *there* am I in the midst of them." "The hour cometh, says Jesus to the woman of Samaria, "when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father;" that is, exclusively. Thus he dwelleth not in temples made with hands; but wherever we worship him in spirit and in truth we are accepted of him. As to external sanctity, all places are alike to him. It is his presence that confers sacredness and dignity. And where has not this been enjoyed? When Jacob on his journey awoke in the morning, though there was no edifice near, he said, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Our Lord, in the days of his flesh, not only worshipped in the temple, but in the synagogues; and preached by the side of the mountain, and the way-side, and the sea-side, and on board a barge: and he gives proof now, that he is to be found wherever he is sought. Where the King is there is the Court: but some think more of the place than of the king. Their prejudice and bigotry would confine his regards. But while they cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are *we*;" he graciously says, "In *all* places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

The second regards *number*—"Where *two* or *three* are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It was not without design, that our Lord, instead of a multitude, which seems imposing and striking, specifies such a few. It would rectify the mistake of the Jews, who contended that there must be always ten persons present, at least, to give efficacy to social prayer. It would encourage his followers, both in cases of choice and necessity. Some few may be disposed to meet together for prayer, reading the Scripture, pious conversation, or to arrange or execute plans of usefulness; and why may they not expect that *he* will meet with them? Did not he join the two disciples going to Emmaus, and made their hearts burn within them? Let us make him our subject, and he will become our companion. When two or three fellow-citizens happen to be in the same place abroad, they soon hail each other and become acquainted; they are sure to meet together and commune concerning the difference between their present residence and their own country; and inquire when they heard from home; and when they think of returning. How is it that Christians, who are strangers and sojourners, do not oftener "meet and mingle?" and compare the vanity of this world with the worth of their own? and joyful, as the children of Zion in their king, talk of the glory of his kingdom, and abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness?

But there are cases in which only a few can meet together. Persecution formerly prevented or dispersed the worshippers; and only small parties, in places of concealment, and in the night, could assemble—Yet these were distinguished seasons and services. When the Gospel now first enters a town or village it frequently meets with opposition; and fear and shame restrain many from attending. Yet let not the day of small things be despised. Some of our most flourishing Churches arose from very inconsiderable beginnings—a few from time to time passed along unnoticed, or reproached, to some poor apartment, where they claimed the Saviour's promise, and found it good to be there—And now the little one has become a thousand—What has God wrought! If the weather reduces the number, let us not, if possible, be absent ourselves—The exertion and self-denial will not be in vain—Them that honour him, he will honour; and they that despise him will be lightly esteemed.

This also teaches ministers. Popular excitement is pleasing. But multitude is not essential to usefulness. A sportsman has fired into a flight of birds, and not killed one of them; and he has killed one when he has had only one to aim at. When tempted to excuse himself from going, or to *neglect preparation* because there is such a handful of poor rustics, let the preacher remember the value of a soul—Let him remember that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth—Let him remember that a much greater than himself—the Lord of all, will be there—"For where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there is he in the midst of them."

JUNE 24.

"*In my Name.*"—Matt. xviii. 20.

We have seen that no stress is to be laid on the *circumstances* of the worship. But it is otherwise with the *nature* of it. The *place* and the *number* of the assembly are nothing —"*where*"—let it be where it will; "*two* or *three*"—if there be no more—"are gathered together," it is enough—if they are "gathered together IN HIS NAME." But this is essential to Christian worship. What is the meaning of the requisition!

We cannot do it in his Name unless we do it by his *authority*. This import of the phrase is too obvious to require proof or exemplification. Jesus is the Judge and the King in his Church: his will is made known in his word: to this our appeal is to be made, in all spiritual concerns: it is the only rule by which we are to walk. It matters not who enjoins it if he forbids, or who forbids it if he enjoins—To the law and to the testimony. Nothing is binding on the conscience without his sanction: but his followers must say, "All the Lord commandeth us we will do"—And *because* he commands it.

We cannot do it in his Name unless we do it for *his sake*. When a speaker says, "in the name of reason and common sense;" he means, by the respect which it is supposed men are ready to pay to them. If in arguing with a rebellious child I was to plead "in the name of her who bore him," I should be understood to mean, by the affection he owed to so dear a relation. And when our Lord speaks of our "receiving a little child in his name," he means from regard to himself—or because we are desirous of serving and honouring him. He always demands a supreme regard from his disciples. He tells them that whoever loves father, or mother, or wife, or child, more than himself, is not worthy of him. And he deserves what he requires. And when we are brought to know him, we shall feel no reluctance thus to regard his dear Name. "How much do I owe him! What has he not done for me? He has made, preserved, redeemed, saved me. When I consider the state in which he found me—the condition to which he has advanced me—and the awful and expensive manner in which he has accomplished my salvation: I feel that I am not my own. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And does he require us to sanctify his day, to repair to his house, to hear his word, to address his throne, to approach his table; we shall not only do it, but—it is the nature of love, we should do it with pleasure; and the duty will be found our privilege.

We cannot do it in his Name, unless we do it in a *dependence on his mediation*. Now there are two things which we must rely upon him for. The one is, assistance. We can only serve him in strength derived from him. These are his own words, "Abide in me. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me: for without me ye can do nothing." Our work is great, and we are weak; but his grace is sufficient for us. The service asks the utmost spirituality, and we feel every thing but a suitableness to it when we engage: but "the preparation of the heart, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord." The supply of his Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and keeps us under our discouragements from giving up so poor and defective a course of duty and devotion.

The other is acceptance. We are to come unto God by him; and by him we are to offer up all our spiritual sacrifices. If we are accepted, it must be in the Beloved, not only as to our persons, but services. A Christian feels this. His imperfections are his afflictions; and he is conscious of so many deficiencies, that he would have no delight nor confidence in drawing near to God without this hope. If, when he examines himself, and the sins of his holy things appear, he feels relief, it is by looking unto Jesus. But when he views the infinite value of his sacrifice, the perfection of his obedience, the prevalency of his intercession and advocacy; he has humble boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. And even originally he could not have been so endeared to God as he now is—thus coming in his name—sprinkled with his blood—and making mention of his righteousness only.

What a difference is there between the language of the Scripture concerning Christ, and the sentiments entertained of him by some who yet consider themselves to be Christians! *They* refer to him so rarely and so slenderly, that their hearers may almost be considered "as without Christ." But the Scripture tells us that "we are complete in him"—That he "is all and in all"—That whatsoever we do in word or deed, we are to do *all* in THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS."

JUNE 25.

"*There am I in the midst of them.*"
Matt. xviii. 20.

A LARGE portion of the Scripture is promissory; and the promises it contains are exceeding great and precious. Some of these, as we would naturally expect, are designed and adapted to excite and encourage us in the exercises of divine worship. Accordingly, the Lord said of old, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And if such was his language to Jewish worshippers, what says he to Christian assemblies? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, THERE AM

I IN THE MIDST OF THEM." This cannot be understood of his corporeal presence; for as to this, he said, "I am no more in the world," and no more will he be in the world, as to his bodily presence, "till he should appear a second time, without sin unto salvation." It is also to be distinguished from his essential presence; for by this he is everywhere, and fills heaven and earth. Whenever his presence is spoken of in a way of promise, it intends not the perfection of his nature, but a privilege. Thus though he is not far from any one of us, yet it is said, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." It is of such a peculiar and gracious presence he here speaks.

And thus he is with all his people. He is with them in their own persons; with them in the closet; with them in the family—But "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion better than all the dwellings of Jacob"—

> "His mercy visits every house,
> That pay their night and morning vows;
> But makes a more delightful stay,
> Where churches meet to praise and pray."

It is observable that he does not say what he will *do* there, but only that he *is* there, in the midst of them. This is assurance enough. His presence is all his people can need; for with him is the fountain of life. Moses desired nothing more than that his presence should go with him. David was emboldened by this to look into the valley of the shadow of death—"I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." What is heaven? To "be for ever with the Lord."

Well, when they are gathered together in his name; there he is in the midst of them, as a physician in the midst of his disordered patients; as a father in the midst of his family; as the sun is in the midst of the garden in spring; as the soul is in the body, animating every member, and penetrating every particle of the frame. There he is, to enliven their devotions, to hear their complaints, to relieve their wants, to give them grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing from them. There he is, to pardon the guilty, to enrich the poor, to comfort the mourners, to be the father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widow in his holy habitation.

Christians! you are his witnesses. This assurance you have often tried; and it has now become a matter of history and experience. There he gave you these eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to feel. You know the preacher could not have made you "a new creature"—"the excellency of the power was of God"—"God was in the midst of them of a truth." There you have found him in painful discoveries, which laid open the chambers of imagery in the heart; and made you cry, "Behold, I am vile;" "wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." There you have enjoyed him in the manifestations of his love; and have been convinced that they were not the delusions of fancy, or the ferments of animal nature, by their humbling, holy, heavenly tendency. There he has removed your perplexities and doubts; freed your conscience of its galling load; and spoken many a word in season to your weary souls: so that you can now say,

> "In every new distress,
> We'll to his house repair;
> We'll think upon his wond'rous grace,
> And seek deliverance there"—

And go—always pleading this promise, and saying, "Do as thou hast said:" "Fulfil thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." That hope will not, cannot make you ashamed. Your expectation is sustained not only by his goodness, but also by his truth. *You* could not have bound him but *he* has bound himself. He *cannot* be absent from your assembly, if you meet in his name—For he hath said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM."

JUNE 26.

"*Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.*"—Matt. xviii. 20.

LET me take this blessed assurance, and consider it

As a demonstration of my Saviour's divinity. Who less than God could have given such a promise? He does not say, there shall my blessing be, but myself: yea, not there *will* I be, but there I *am*. This necessarily supposes omnipresence. How else could he be in so many companies and places at once? How many assemblies are there on the Sabbath in the various parts of the earth? And, if there be truth or meaning in this promise, he is in every one of them, attending to all the peculiarities of individual condition, and affording the most suitable relief. Could an angel do this? But

Let me consider it a standard by which to estimate his condescension and grace. Here I find David before me—"When," says he, "I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" So felt also his son Solomon, at the dedication of the temple. It was a glorious scene; and a common mind would have been struck with the splendour of the building, the largeness of the audience, and the sound of such a multitude of performers; but he, wondering that the Supreme Being should deign to notice it, exclaims, "Will God in very deed dwell with men upon the earth? Behold, the heaven, even the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this

house which I have built?" See, O my soul, he not only allows us to wait upon him, but he waits upon us. Small as our number may be, wherever we meet together he is in the midst of us—however poor and unworthy—and as often as they choose to assemble—and he has been always doing this—and will continue to do it to the end of time! "Who is a God like unto thee?"

Let it serve to bind me to a proper demeanour in his house. There is always something impressive in a company of human beings, especially if there be in the midst of them some very distinguished personage, such as a hero, a philosopher, a king. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." In his presence let me guard against a roving eye; wandering thoughts; drowsiness; hypocrisy; formality. When I enter the sanctuary, I place myself immediately under his view—and he sees me, and knows whether my devotion be any thing more than a form of godliness or a fair show in the flesh.

Let it impress me with the importance of social and public worship. Some ask, "May we not read and pray and meditate at home! And will not this equally answer the purpose with our joining in the service of the sanctuary?" But the Judge of all has decided this, not only by his command that we forsake not the assembling ourselves together, but by his promise that he is in the midst of us. Indeed, reason and experience will lead us to the same result. In his house the greater number of the Lord's followers are called by grace; and they who are not born, are nourished there. It is thus excitement and allurement are provided to call the ignorant and the careless together. Nothing tends so much to civilize and harmonize men as their frequently uniting in such exercises; and nothing tends so much to keep the distinctions of life from excess and abuse.

Let it also prove a stimulation to the use of the means of grace. Some think it is needless for them to go to the sanctuary, because the minister can tell them no more than they know already. This is very questionable. But allowing that the servant is unable to do any thing more for them, is the Master too! I do not go only or principally because the preacher is there, but because the Saviour himself is there, whose sufficiency is divine. How is the company of the great courted! If the Lord Jesus was now on earth, should I not, if I had an opportunity, repair to him; and deem it a privilege to see him, hear him, and hold converse with him? But I know where he now is, waiting to be gracious, and exalted to have mercy; and I have full and easy access to him. Let me then suffer nothing to keep me from the assembly of his saints. Let not the creature prevent my serving and enjoying God. If I had an engagement with the king, should I not deem it even an honour to be able to allege such a reason for my refusing a person who called at the appointed hour? If I am indifferent to the Lord's gracious presence on earth, what right have I to expect his glorious presence in heaven? But if I now love the habitation of his house, and the place where his honour dwelleth, at death I shall only remove to his temple above, where I shall worship him, not with a few, but with the general assembly; not with infirmities which make me groan, being burdened, but with powers equal to the service; not with long intervals between, and the returns of worldly care and vexations, but to be still praising him—

JUNE 27.

"*Singing.*"—Ephes. v. 19.

All believe that hearing is a duty, and that prayer is a duty; but some question whether this is the case with singing. Now there is something in our very structure that seems equal to a proof of the obligation. We cannot imagine a faculty was given us which was never intended to be used; especially a faculty from which so much pleasure and advantage can be derived and communicated. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and this power of vocal music far surpasses all mechanical performance: no instrument, however surprising or perfect, can *express words:* but in singing, man can *speak;* and inform while he delights. How shameful is it that such an unrivalled endowment should be perverted, or degraded to evil purposes! But we are not to argue against the use of a thing from the abuse of it. Let us remember that God is to be glorified in our body, as well as in our spirit. Let us say with David, "Awake up, my glory: I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being."

Singing is not a ritual duty. It preceded the ceremonial law; and when our Saviour had abolished the passover, and his own supper had succeeded to it—"after supper he sang a hymn." He thereby showed that such a service belonged to the new state which he had introduced, and was to be a part of *Christian* worship. Accordingly the sanction of his example, which had the authority of a command, was not disregarded by his disciples, either in practice or precept. Thus the apostles at Philippi not only prayed, but sang praises in the prison, so that the prisoners heard them. And Paul says to the Ephesians; "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." And James adds, "Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

How should singing be performed? Sometimes when we are alone. David had his "songs in the night:" the solitary effusions of pious excitement. In the life of Joseph Alleine we find that he always sung in his closet devotion, and which in the morning was never later than five o'clock.

It should prevail where it can be established in family worship. He does well, says Henry, who with his house prays night and morning; he does better who prays and reads the Scriptures; but he does best who prays, and reads, and sings too. I fear this holy custom of our forefathers has been for a long time on the decline. The observance of it would tend much to exclude dullness and formality; and be far more interesting to servants and children than long reading and lengthened prayer. This should be done at least on the Sabbath. An old author tells us, he remembered the time when in numberless houses, at certain hours on the Lord's day, singing might be heard as you passed, from one end of London to the other. The ninety-second Psalm is called "a Song for the Sabbath-day;" and, says David, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High: to show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night."

But when we enter the courts of the Lord, and engage in public worship, the command lays hold of us, "Serve the Lord with gladness; and come before his presence with singing." Here the singing should be congregational. For this purpose few things should be introduced which the people cannot *soon* join in. Hence all persons should *learn* to sing, at least *decently*, that when they join, they may aid and not injure—The singing in family-worship would be a preparative for public devotion. What can be said for those who are well able to help, and yet seldom or never lift up their voice in this divine exercise, from sloth, fastidiousness, or pride? Who introduced the mode of sitting we know not; but surely it does not appear the most desirable one; and though the posture is not essential to the spirituality of our worship, we should be governed even in the outward acts, by what is most preferable, by being most suitable, and becoming, and useful, and scriptural. How often do we read of the people standing up to praise the Lord! What should we think to see the choir sitting while they perform? And what can the choir think, when they see us sitting during the psalmody—but that we have nothing to do with it—unless as an entertainment from them.

But what is to be said in recommendation of this duty? It is a very instructive ordinance. How many important truths are we mutually informed or reminded of by it, and which are also rendered peculiarly impressive, by the pleasing manner in which they are again and again repeated—Hence says the Apostle, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

It is also a very enlivening exercise. Nothing is so adapted to excite holy affections. Let any one, in order to prove this, *read* only, and then *sing* the very same words; and what a difference will he feel in the effects of the two? Nothing tends so much to animate to courage and confidence; and therefore it has always been employed in warfare. On a similar principle, there never has been a revival of religion, in any country, or in any neighbourhood, but has been attended with a fondness for psalmody. Luther knew the force of it, and much and successfully encouraged it in the beginning and progress of the Reformation in Germany.

It is the most social ordinance. In preaching and prayer one leads, and the rest silently join; but here all concur, and stimulate each other.

To which we may add, it is the most permanent of our religious engagements. Our other sacred employments will soon cease; but we shall be still praising Him. In heaven our harps will never be hung on the willows, our hearts will never be untuned. We shall perfectly and for ever sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The work and the joy of heaven are more represented by this service than by any thing and by every thing else.

JUNE 28.

"*In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.*"
2 Kings xx. 1.

Sickness is one of the common calamities of our nature, from the assailings of which we shall never be secure till we enter Immanuel's land. There "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick;" for sin, the cause of all our maladies, will be removed, and all the moral purposes for which Providence employs them will be accomplished. And with what bodies shall we come! Bodies no longer requiring the insensibilities of sleep; no longer feeling the cravings of animal appetite; no longer exposed to accidents; no longer susceptible of disease. How trying and humiliating the scene now; for an immortal spirit to stand and nurse a crazy fragment of flesh; to be tethered within a few yards of space; to suspend its operations and enjoyments in obedience to a writhing foot, or an aching tooth; to view every thing through a dull and distracting medium, and approach God himself through the wretched medium of shattered nerves! Oh what will it be to have a body like the Saviour's own glorious body; a body far superior to the body of the earthly Adam in paradise; a body meet to be the companion

of the soul—not a disgrace to the soul, but its ornament—not an encumbrance to the soul, but its helper; enlarging its sphere of action and enjoyment by relating it again to the material universe, to the new heaven, and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!

Some have had little sickness. These should admire and bless the care that has secured to them so long the possession and indulgence of health. Yet let them remember the days of darkness, for they may be many; and let them sympathize with the sons and daughters of bodily affliction. How many are there at this moment drowning with dropsy, burning with fever, oppressed with asthma! Some are made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto them; others are chastened also with pain upon their bed, and the multitude of their bones with strong pain, so that their life abhorreth bread, and their soul dainty meat.

Hezekiah's sickness may be viewed three ways. First, in connexion with his age—He was between thirty and forty. He had reached the perfection of manhood: and was in the midst of life—but in the midst of life we are in death—and forty is as mortal as fourscore.

Secondly, in reference to his condition and rank. He was a king and a mighty monarch. "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." The great and noble too often despise those who are below them. Wherefore? Are they not partakers of the same flesh and blood? subject to the same infirmities? inheriters of the same mortality? Are not they also hastening to the grave, where they will say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister? We are prone to envy the great and the affluent. But does a man's life consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses? Can honour or titles terrify away, or bribe off any of the ills that flesh is heir to? Can they assuage the anguish of disease? Yea, are not the upper classes more liable to disorders? and less qualified to bear them?

Thirdly, with regard to his piety. For he was a good man, and the friend of God. So was Epaphroditus; yet was he sick nigh unto death. So was Lazarus; and therefore the sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. And his love is almighty. Why then does he not exempt the objects of it from every thing disagreeable and distressing? Surely if by a mere volition *we* could ease the complaints of a beloved connexion, we should instantly do it. But his love is as wise as it is powerful. His ways and his thoughts are as much above ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. Say not therefore, If we belong to him why are we thus afflicted? The correction results from the relation: what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? You are pruned because you are vines. You are put into the furnace because you are gold. He has designs to answer by such dispensations which will more than justify them. He intends to wean them from the world; to make them witnesses for himself; to display in them the truth of his word, the power of his grace, the tenderness of his care. As one whom his mother comforteth, so, says he, will I comfort you. The mother disregards none of her offspring; but she arranges things with a peculiar view to her poor weak sickly infant. The knee; the bosom; the delicacy; the softest bed; the breathless movement is for him. So has it been, as Scripture and experience have testified in all ages, with Christians; as their sufferings have abounded, their consolation has abounded also. Perhaps they are never so impressive as by the exercise and display of the passive graces: never glorify God so much as in the fires. For this they are concerned; and therefore when they are led into the chamber of sickness, and laid on the bed of languishing, their fears are awakened lest they should dishonour their profession: and they pray to be examples of the reality, and excellency, and efficacy of their religious principles and resources. And he hears and answers them. He is with them in trouble. He enables them in patience to possess their souls. He fills them with all joy and peace in believing. They instruct, invite, and encourage others; while their own praise, wonder, and confidence are excited; and they can sing,

> "Bastards may escape the rod,
> Sunk in earthly vain delight:
> But a true-born child of God
> Must not—would not—if he might."

JUNE 29.

"*Thou wilt recover me.*"—Isaiah xxxviii. 16.

And he did so. This is not always the case. Sickness to some, yea, to many, is the messenger, the forerunner, the beginning of death. And Hezekiah's sickness seems to have been in itself mortal, and would have issued in his speedy dissolution, but for the divine interposition—he "was sick nigh unto death;" and the Lord said unto him, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." But he was the subject of recovering mercy; and five things are recorded in connexion with the event.

It was in answer to prayer. "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." One of the designs of affliction is to bring us to God; and by prayer we obtain support under

it, and sanctification by it, and deliverance from it—"Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." And did any ever seek him in vain? Did Hezekiah? So far from it, and to show how quickly prayer reaches God, and brings down the blessing, before Isaiah could get through the palace-yard the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go and say to Hezekiah; I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears." Thus he not only hears and answers prayer, but fulfils the word, "Ere they call I will answer, and while they speak I will hear."

The second circumstance was the definite prolongation of his life—"Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." This was a considerable reprieve. Yet it was nothing more. For so long a time he was raised up, but he was left mortal. The sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," was only suspended. Have any of you been recovered from the bed of sickness? Remember you are dying creatures still; and *you* have no assurance of *your* life. *You* know not what a day, or an hour may bring forth. The addition of fifteen years would not make Hezekiah an old man; and they would soon pass away like a dream. He is the only person who was previously informed how long he had to live. Doubtless he was concerned to improve the information; and would often say, "Well, there is another of the fifteen years gone, and the remainder is rapidly going—So teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." Yet it was awful for him to know the term of life. None of us would know it, if it were in our power. It is better for our comfort to be ignorant; and it is better for our improvement. As the shade upon the dial is useful as well as the sunshine; so our ignorance may be rendered profitable—"Watch, for ye know not at what hour the Lord doth come."

The third circumstance is the important blessing that accompanied the announcement of his restoration. He was pressed by the Assyrian force which had entered the country, taken all the strong-holds in the way, and was now besieging Jerusalem—What would fifteen years have been had he passed them in personal captivity, or in a subdued and degraded empire, or in a state of constant alarm or suspicion? But God perfects the mercy: "And I will deliver thee, and this city, out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city." What would it be to lengthen out our existence, without our limbs, our senses, our reason, our relative comforts? But God giveth liberally. He giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

The fourth circumstance regards the supernatural confirmation of it—"And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he hath spoken; behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down." Why was this sign given? Was not the word of a faithful God sufficient? The Lord does nothing in vain. He saw the state of Hezekiah's mind: he knew that there was something ready to faint in his faith and hope: and therefore he passes by the infirmity, and indulges his wishes—for he had said, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Thus he stoops, and accommodates himself to the imperfections of his people. He does not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax. And shall we despise the day of small things?

The last circumstance is the employment of means—"For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover." It is well known that figs have a virtue to ripen an imposthume, and bring it to a head, that the peculency may be removed: but in the case before us, from the nature and prevalency of the disease, no means would have availed without the peculiar agency of God. The fact therefore is very instructive. We see that *prayer* does not supersede the use of means. We also see that the *divine assurance* does not supersede the use of them: for no sooner has Isaiah promised his recovery as a prophet, than he prescribes for him as a physician. Yea, the very *miraculousness* of the cure does not supersede the use of them. Miracles were never a waste of power; never intended to make people wonder only; or to save them the trouble of doing what they are able to do for themselves. Miracles therefore were never needlessly multiplied: and even when they have been performed, there was nothing in the *degree* of them that was unnecessary or superfluous. The manna descended from the clouds; but the people were to gather it. The angel opened the prison door, and released Peter from his fetters;—this he could not do himself: but he did not take him up in his arms, and carry him to the house of Mary; but said unto him, Follow me; for he had legs and feet, and why should he not employ them? It is a great thing to unite activity and dependence: to use means, and not neglect to trust in God; and to trust in God, and not neglect to use means. "I lead," says Wisdom, "in the midst of the paths of judgment."

JUNE 30.

"*The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness.*"—Isaiah xxxviii. 9.

Many persons are afraid of their trials. It would be wiser to fear their mercies. They are in more danger from their friends than

from their enemies; from their comforts than from their crosses; from their health than from their sickness. They often desire our prayers when they come into affliction: but they need them most when they are coming out of it; and are returning into scenes of danger and temptation again.

Wicked and worldly men are only anxious to escape from their troubles. But it ought to be our concern to inquire whether we "come forth as gold"—whether we are brought nearer to God, or are left farther from him, by the things we suffer. Constantine the Great said, "I marvel that many of my subjects, since they became Christians, are worse than they were when they were Pagans." Young speaks of some as "worse for mending," and "washed to fouler stains." And it is lamentable to think how many, instead of being improved by their recovery from disease, are injured by it. They poured out a prayer when God's chastening hand was upon them, and confessed, and resolved, and vowed unto the Lord: but when he relieved and released them they turned again to folly. Many think we are severe in our reflections on death-bed changes; and wonder that we think such conversions can never be entirely satisfactory to the subjects of them, or their surviving friends. Yet of how many ministers have we inquired, all of whom have affirmed, that they never knew such converts, when recovered, living according to their promises! yet had they died they would have entertained a firm hope concerning many of them. And it is probable funeral sermons would have been preached for some of them—and how would others have been chronicled in the magazines! Even Jacob forgot the vow his soul made when he was in trouble, till God said unto him, "Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." Then, and not before, did the backslider say, "Let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

Hezekiah did better upon his recovery. He wrote a song, and had it sung in the temple-service. He might indeed, for this purpose, have availed himself of one of David's songs; and we read that he appointed persons to sing the songs of his illustrious ancestor in the worship of God. But he composed one himself on this occasion, not from vanity, but from sentiments of piety. He wrote it in particular for three purposes.

First, to show the importance of the blessing he had experienced. Read his language, and you will find how much he valued life. This to some may seem strange. To a good man, is it not gain to die? When a voyager is entering the desired haven, is he so glad and grateful for a wind that blows him back again to sea? The fear of death is as much a natural principle as hunger or thirst. Every good man, though always in a state to die, is not in a frame to die. He may not have the light of God's countenance, or the assurance of hope. He may be also influenced by relative considerations. This was the case with Hezekiah. He might have feared for the succession; for he had no offspring at this time: Manasseh was only twelve years old at his death, and therefore could not have been born till three years after his father's recovery. The enemy was also at the gates of the capital. He had also begun a glorious reformation, and wished to see it carried on. Even Paul, though he knew that to depart and to be with Christ was far better, yet was more than willing to abide in the flesh, for the advantage of the Philippians and others.

Secondly, to excite his gratitude. Hence he so vividly recalls all his painful and gloomy feelings in his late danger, that he might be the more affected with the goodness of his deliverer and benefactor—read the whole chapter—Do as he did. Dwell upon every thing that can give a relish, and add an impression to the blessing you have received; and be ye thankful—and employ your tongues, your pens, your lives, in praise of the God of your mercies. Did the heathen upon their recovery hang up tablets of acknowledgments in the house of their gods? Have Papists built churches and altars to their patron-saints? And will you do nothing for the Lord your healer? Yet so it often is! The physician is cheerfully rewarded; the attendants are paid for their trouble; friends are thanked for their obliging inquiries—only one Being is overlooked—*He* who gave the physician his skill; he who rendered the means effectual; he who inspired the inquiring friends with all their tenderness.

Thirdly, to insure a sense of his obligation in future. The Jews soon forgot the works of the Lord, and the wonders he had shown them. And we are very liable to the same evil. But we should say, with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *forget* not all his benefits;" and avail ourselves of every assistance that can enable us to recover and preserve the feelings we had at the time when the Lord appeared for us. Thus the Jews established the feast of Purim upon their deliverance from the plot of Haman. Thus Samuel raised a stone after his victory, and called it Ebenezer. Joseph named his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, to remind him of the contrast between his former and present condition. And thus Hezekiah would compose this writing, that he might compare himself with its sentiments, months and years

after; and that it might be a pledge of his dedication to God; and a witness against him if his love should ever wax cold—

And how was it with him? Can I proceed? So far all is well. He is wise, humble, grateful, resolved. But, alas! how shall we say it! "After this Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done him; for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath came upon him and upon all Judah." Lord, what is man! Who is beyond the danger of falling while in this world? On what can we safely rely! He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool. And he is not much better that trusts in his own grace. It is not *our* grace, but *his* grace that is sufficient for us. Let us therefore be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Let us not insult over others when they err in doctrine or in practice; but tremble for ourselves, and pray, Lord, hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. Blessed is the man that feareth always.

JULY 1.

"*By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*"—Heb. xi. 21.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." No wonder therefore that he graciously appoints the time, the place, and the manner of it; that he honours it with his special presence; and calls upon us to make it the subject of our contemplation: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." For this purpose he has often mentioned it in his word, and has sometimes recorded it with circumstances the most striking and improving. Let us convey ourselves into Egypt, find out Goshen, inquire for the house of Jacob, and enter his chamber of sickness. It will be found none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. He is "a dying:" and observe how he dies.

First; he "*leans upon the top of his staff.*" Thus he looks like a pilgrim. Had he recourse to this action to aid such an impression? The Jews were to eat the passover with their staves in their hand: and we should observe every ordinance, form every connexion, enjoy every advantage, as those who have heard the voice, Arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest. Abraham wished to preserve the recollection of this, and therefore he "sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God:" and it was thus "they confessed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth." Give me, says the dying traveller, my staff—Was this staff the same he spoke of when he was returning from Haran, "With my staff I passed over Jordan, and now I am become two bands!" If so, and the thing is very probable, how many feelings would this companion of all his journeys revive! For after a length of time even inanimate things draw from us a strange kind of regard, and affect us, if not by themselves, yet by their associations.—But it was an instance of his bodily decline and infirmity. He whose constitution had enabled him to bear such travels and fatigues is now reduced to the weakness of infancy and dependence; and leans upon the top of his staff. "The glory of young men is their strength:" but let them remember their Creator in the days of their youth; for the evil days will come when they shall say, We have no pleasure in them; when they that look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the grasshopper be a burden, because man goeth to his long home.—It was also a proof of his conscientiousness in duty. He would place himself in the best posture of devotion his infirmities would admit. We are to glorify God in our bodies as well as in our spirits; and though he does not bind us down to any corporeal forms, yet every thing in his service should be expressive of reverence and godly fear. The Seraphim veil their faces with their wings. Our Lord kneeled three times in the garden. So Jacob, aged as he was, and under the debility of approaching dissolution, when he would adore God, rose upon his knees, though he was obliged to seek support. Think of this, ye who in full health and vigour, instead of kneeling or standing, *sit* during the devotion of the sanctuary; and see how far you come short of the self-denial and godliness of this patriarch.

Secondly, He "*worshipped*, leaning upon the top of his staff." He had been trained up in the nurture and admonition of "the fear of his father Isaac;" and had long walked before him; but now he was ending the worship of him on earth, to join in the worship of him in heaven that would never end. This worship doubtless included confession. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? Some talk of looking back upon a well-spent life. A good man, if he has been distinguished from others, knows who has made him to differ; and sees in the review of his obedience a thousand imperfections which humble him, and prevent all confidence in the flesh. He feels that he is an unprofitable servant, and says in his last approach still more than in all his former ones, "I come, trusting not in my own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." It had also in it thanksgiving. He had experienced many personal and relative troubles; but out of them all the Lord had delivered him. The angry storms of life were now

blown over, and a serene evening had arrived. He had escaped the difficulties and dangers of a tiresome road, and was now in sight of the journey's end, and of his father's house. It is easy to imagine the grateful emotions of his mind when he remembered his flight from the face of his brother, the vision of Beth-el, and the promise of God that he would be with him, and keep him in all places, and never leave him nor forsake him. All this had now been accomplished. "Bless the Lord," would he say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." It contained also prayer. He would implore mercy and grace to help in this time of need; for he had yet to die. O my God, strengthen me this once. "O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wonderous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." And he prayed not only for himself, but for others, especially those of his own house. For,

Thirdly, he "*blessed both the sons of Joseph;* and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." The affair is recorded in the book of Genesis with the most touching simplicity. Understanding that his father was sick, Joseph hastens to visit him: and he takes his two sons with him. It was wise in him to show these youths, who had been living in splendour, such a solemn scene, and to place them under the dying benediction of this man of God. Jacob was overjoyed at their arrival, and said, "Who are these? And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them." The feelings of men towards their grandchildren are commonly very powerful: but every thing here tended to increase affection. Manasseh and Ephraim were the offspring of Joseph; and Joseph was his favourite son, endeared by his loss and sufferings; he was also the son of his beloved Rachel. O could he have *seen* the image and representatives of Rachel—*her* son and—*her* grandsons! But "the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And Joseph brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh. And he set Ephraim before Manasseh." Let us endeavour to be useful as long as we continue here, and do good, not only living but dying. It will be well if we are able to say something that shall bless survivors. Parting words are peculiarly impressive and memorable. Children who have disregarded the living counsel of a father have followed his dying admonitions: and the commendations of religion which Christians have expressed, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost which they have experienced in the final hour, have frequently rendered their departure a blessing to many. It has encouraged the fearful. It has convinced the unbelieving. It has induced even a Balaam to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Finally; "*By faith* he blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." We allow there was something extraordinary in this transaction. Jacob was under a degree of divine inspiration; and this appears in the manner of his blessing these children: for he not only poured forth the tenderness of his heart towards them, but he admitted them, though born in Egypt, into his family and the congregation of Israel; and constituted them, though their mother was a Gentile, heads of tribes, like his own offspring; overruled the claims of seniority, and pronounced their future number and prosperity. Yet all his faith on this occasion was not of this extraordinary nature. The Apostle does not speak of him as a seer, so much as a saint. He would tell us that he brought forth fruit in old age: that while the outward man perished, the inward man was renewed: that while the eyes of his flesh were dim, the eyes of his understanding were enlightened: that he saw and acknowledged not only the God of providence, but the God of all grace: that he extended his views beyond the bounds of time and sense: that he recognized in Canaan a better, even a heavenly country: that he hailed in his seed the Shiloh that was to come, and in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. What would his dying faith have been, had he only proved the organ of Divine omniscience concerning things to come? Balaam "had his eyes open, and heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High:" and he said, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh." But Jacob was an heir of promise: Jacob could say, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." And this is the grand thing —This is what we shall all want when, like him, we are "a dying." When heart and flesh fail, when we are leaving all that is dear below, and entering an eternal state, we shall require all the views, all the influences, all the appropriations of faith. We have heard

more than one saying, while engaged in it, "dying is hard work." We shall all find it so, if left to the resources of nature and reason only. But faith can make dying work easy work. "I can smile on death," said Dr. Grosvenor, "because my Saviour smiles on me." Simeon, with the babe in the arms of his flesh, and the consolation of Israel in the arms of his faith, said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

O thou Author of all good, inspire my soul with this all-important principle, to make me meet for every season and condition. May the life that I now live in the flesh be by the faith of the Son of God. And may I finish my course with joy, and be able to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

JULY 2.

"*And he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.*" —Mark iii. 5.

Every thing in the temper and conduct of our Lord and Saviour is worthy attention; and the fact before us will be found very instructive and useful.

We see that the passions are not evil in themselves. They are inherent in our very nature. It is therefore impossible to divest ourselves of them; and if it were possible we should only reduce ourselves to mere reasoning machines, and unimpressible intelligences. The passions are the springs and impulses of action. All that religion does is, to govern and regulate them, and to furnish each of them with an appropriate sphere, object, and agency.

We learn that we may be angry and sin not. This is the case when we are angry at sin. This he who was the Holy One of God felt and expressed. It is our duty and honour to resemble him; and it is a proof that we are of one Spirit, if what offended him offends us, and we cannot bear them that are evil.

Yet anger should be always attended with grief. We should grieve to see men suffering, but we should grieve more to see them sinning. We should feel more to see a man proud than poor, to see him led captive by vice than laid in irons. No character is so truly pitiable as the wretch who is destroying himself for ever. David felt this, and said, I beheld the transgressors and was grieved: and Jesus was here grieved at the hardness of their hearts. Fools only make a mock of sin. To laugh at a man who is inflicting upon his soul the torments of hell, is far more cruel than to turn into sport and merriment the tortures of a fellow-creature on the rack. Paul, in his climax, considers our "having pleasure" in the sins of others a greater instance of depravity than "doing them" ourselves; and the reason is, because we may have powerful temptations to the one, whereas the other results from pure congeniality: nothing shows us more than that which can yield us pleasure. So, on the other hand, the purest grief is that which we feel for the sins of others. Selfish respect may have some place in concern for our sins, because they endanger us; but we shall not be punished for the sins of others. When therefore we suffer for *them*, we sorrow after a godly sort; we are affected with sin *as* sin; and evince the truest benevolence. And so pleasing to God is such a disposition, that in times of public calamity he ordered "a mark" of preservation to be imposed "upon the foreheads of the men that sighed and cried for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the land."

In our Lord we see the finest moral harmony arising from the perfect union of diverse feelings and affections. His zeal was not without discretion; his prudence was not without fervour. His authority dignified his condescension; his kindness softened and endeared his power. His compassion was not without censure; his censure was not without pity. He distinguished between the sin and the sinner; and at once displayed his displeasure and his distress—"He looked round about on them *with anger, being grieved* for the hardness of their hearts." So should it be with us.

Let us beware that our tenderness does not degenerate into connivance at evil. Adam was too complaisant, even to a wife, when he refused not the forbidden fruit, though presented by Eve. And what judgments did Eli draw down upon himself and family, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not! The Scripture does not speak with commendation of "men in whose mouth are no reproofs." Yea, it says, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

Let us also take heed that our faithfulness does not deprive us of the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ, or annihilate our concern for the offender in our hatred of the offence. Some Christians are sadly defective here. It might be supposed that they had never read the injunction: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

JULY 3.

"*Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.*"—Exodus xvii. 8.

Though God had relieved the people in their pressure when there was no water for them to drink, yet they had offended and provoked him by their rebellious murmurings. Moses therefore, to perpetuate the memory of their guilt, as well as of their deliverance, gave a new name to the place: "He called it Massah and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?"—And may we not suppose that the present attack upon them was permitted of God, to rebuke and correct them for their sin? For men are his instruments: he controls them when they act most freely; and he employs them righteously when they act against us unjustly. He can also punish *them*, even when they fulfil his pleasure; for he judges them according to their motives and designs, and not according to the effects their actions produce by his overruling interposition. "O Assyrian! the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness? and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of fire."

These Amalekites have been supposed to be the descendants of Esau; but we read of them in the days of Chedorlaomer; and Balaam calls Amalek "the first of the nations." They possessed at this time a large tract of country, extending from the confines of Idumea to the *western* shore of the Red Sea. When therefore Israel crossed over, they were obliged to approach their borders: but they offered them no injury or provocation; and instead of invading their territory, they were turning away from it. We know not what actuated Amalek to assault them; whether it was the hope of plunder, or a wish for military renown, or pure maliciousness. But from the book of Deuteronomy it appears that his conduct was as mean as it was wicked, and as dastardly as it was cruel: for not daring to engage them in front, he waited his opportunity, and smote the hindmost of them, even all that were feeble behind them; and when they were faint and weary, alike incapable of resistance or flight.

The detail of the action on the part of Israel is worthy our attention. They were not only justified in having recourse to arms, but they wisely managed the measure. Though they were a people conducted by the Almighty, who had *miraculously* saved them in Egypt, and delivered them at the Red Sea, and provided them with flesh at Zin, and water where they now were, nothing supernatural is here thought of: for miracles were never intended to be employed where ordinary means were at hand, and sufficient for the purpose. "Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill." Here we have a fine example of activity and reliance: the sword in the hand of Joshua: the rod in the hand of Moses: the host fighting in the vale, as if every thing depended on their strenuousness; the interceder pleading on the hill, as if all was to be accomplished by divine agency. To use means without neglecting trust in God, and to trust in God without omitting the use of means—This is the test of a proper state of mind in religion—This is the union recommended by our Lord and his Apostle. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation:" "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Behold Moses and Joshua on this occasion in their respective departments; and see in what various and suitable ways God qualifies and employs his servants. We should not oppose good and useful men to each other, or even improperly compare them together. We should view them all in reference to their commission, their work, and their adaptation —Then they are equally respectable. Each has his own calling and work. It would be absurd to extol the valour of Joshua at the expense of piety in Moses; or to extol the piety of Moses at the expense of valour in Joshua. It was not for want of courage that Moses prayed; or for want of devotion that Joshua fought—It was the same spirit that actuated the supplicant and the warrior. But "as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." If all were the eye, where were the hearing? and if all were the ear, where were the seeing? It is enough for the eye to see, and the ear to hear, and the foot to walk. It would not be for the beauty and welfare of society that every excellence should be found in the same individuals; and it will always be in vain to look for it.

As nothing like our artillery was then used in fight, a person might safely place himself near enough to survey the scene—Thus Moses was stationed on the brow of a rising ground just by, and within view—And how encouraging must it have been to Israel, as

they advanced to battle, to look up and see him with his arms extended, and holding in his hand the signal of omnipotence! "Yonder," would they say, "Yonder is lifted up the wonder-working rod which has performed so many exploits for us. Yonder is the man who has power with God, and can prevail, imploring for us succour and success."

"And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." This was to show him that the excellency of the power was of God, and not of them; and that means, however good and proper in themselves, are nothing without the concurring agency of Heaven.

But where are the knees that never tremble, and the hands that never hang down? In another world we shall serve God as we ought, and as we would; but in our present state, and while we have these bodies of clay, we cannot do the things that we would. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We are not weary of his service, but we are soon weary in it, and need relief. "Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." Here we learn of what use we may be to each other. Not only did Moses help Joshua, but Aaron and Hur helped Moses. Two are better than one: and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. We cannot be independent of each other. We may often feel our obligations to those who are in many respects our inferiors. Jonathan was not equal to his friend David in religious attainment and experience: yet he went to him in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

Need we wonder at the result of the conflict? Joshua fought under many disadvantages. His men had not seen war. They were raw, undisciplined, and ill-armed. They had been living in bondage. Slavery renders its subjects mean and pusillanimous. Having been treated as brutes, it requires time to make them feel that they are men. It is freedom that nourishes magnanimity and courage —Yet "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword"—for the Lord fought for Israel. So shall all thine enemies perish, O God; while they that love thee shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength.

JULY 4.

"*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*"—Matt. xii. 20.

The terms of the imagery require some little explanation. What means a bruised reed? Some take it for a musical pipe made of reed, and formerly used by shepherds. Such an instrument could never be very enchanting; but when "bruised," would sound inharmoniously and harshly, and would probably be broken to pieces and thrown aside. Others take it for a reed stalk, commonly found in marshy soils. This in its best estate is slender and frail, but when bruised is unable to bear any weight, is unavailing for any useful purpose, and seems fit for nothing but the fire.—And what is "smoking flax?" Here, says Campbell, by a figure of speech, the cause is put for the effect: the smoking flax means the wick of the torch, or candle, made of this material: he therefore renders it "the smoking taper." In this case the flame is extinct; but the tow retaining some particles of fire, sends forth no useful light, but only offensive effluvia. All this is obviously metaphor. But it will not be necessary to endeavour to trace the analogy in various and distinct articles of resemblance. It is enough to seize the spirit and design of the figures. This bruised reed and this smoking flax mean certain characters to be found, not in the world—there is no real religion there, but in the Church. They are persons of very weak and defective attainments in the divine life. They may be described as defective in knowledge, and obscurely acquainted with the things of the Spirit. Or as weak in faith, and full of doubts and fears. Or as afflicted with outward troubles and inward conflicts, while the consolations of God are small with them. Or as the subjects of moral infirmities appearing in their resolutions, temper, and conduct, and concurring to disqualify them for glorifying God, and serving their generation.

Yet low as they are in the eyes of others —and they are lower in their own, the Saviour does not overlook or despise them: "A bruised reed shall he not break, the smoking flax shall he not quench." His regard is only held forth negatively. But will he do nothing more than not destroy, or not injure them? Much more is implied than is expressed. The assurance is that he will sustain, strengthen, and confirm the bruised reed; and rekindle the smoking flax, and cause it to burn clear and bright. And that this is the design is obvious from the delightful addition in which we are told that the work, though opposed, shall be rendered triumphant, "till he send forth judgment unto victory." So truly was it said of him in prophecy, "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." So well did he say of himself, "He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn."

We may view the fact in four periods. First, The period before his incarnation. His "goings forth were of old from everlasting." It was he who appeared to the patriarchs; but hear the testimony of a dying Jacob,

whose failings had been many: "God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day—The *Angel* which redeemed me from all Israel, bless the lads." He was with the Church in the wilderness. And how is his conduct towards them characterized? "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

The second period takes in the days of his flesh. For three-and-thirty years he dwelt among men, and they beheld his glory, and saw him "full of grace and truth." He had compassion on the multitude, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, and he taught them many things. What was his language! "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He saw some faith in the nobleman who applied to him on the behalf of his son; but it was so weak, that he thought our Saviour could not raise him when dead, and that he could not even recover him while living, without his bodily presence, ignorant of the almightiness of his word. But he yields to his desire; "Sir, come down, ere my child die." What dull scholars were his disciples! But he endured their waywardness, and taught them as they were able to bear it. He tenderly apologized for the three disciples in the garden, when, though he had enjoined them, and was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, they could not watch with him one hour—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." When he was apprehended, they all forsook him and fled—Yet he loved them unto the end—and beyond it too—

Observe the third period, the season that elapsed between his resurrection and his ascension. He rose with the same heart with which he died. He instantly appeared to Mary Magdalene, who was weeping, and comforted her. He sent a message to his cowardly and wavering followers, announcing that he was risen. He mentioned Peter, who was inconsolable, by name. He joined Cleopas and his companion, as they were going to Emmaus, and revived their dying faith and hope. He entered the room where the eleven were assembled, and said to their drooping fearful hearts, "Peace be unto you." He accommodated himself with the most surprising condescension to the wish of Thomas, and set his scruples at rest. He took leave of them all, and was parted from them in the very act of blessing them.

The fourth period followed his return to heaven. Out of sight, is often out of mind, with us. The chief butler on his advancement forgot Joseph. Years elapsed after he was enthroned before David inquired after the family of his friend Jonathan. But Jesus remembered his followers as soon as he came into his kingdom. He immediately sent them another comforter. He was touched with the feeling of their infirmities; and appeared in the presence of God for them. He was seen of the dying Stephen in glory; and stood by and strengthened Paul when before Nero. And when he addressed the Seven Churches in Asia, and justly reproved their faults, with what readiness and kindness did he notice and commend the least degree of excellence! Let us take what he said to the church of Philadelphia, and remember that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

JULY 5.

"*Exceeding great and precious promises.*"
2 Peter i. 4.

Not only "great," but "exceeding great, and precious"—Exceeding all example—exceeding all expression—exceeding all conception.

They are exceeding *great* in their *contents*. For what do these promises contain? or rather, what do they *not* contain! They are adapted, and they are adequate to all our woes, wants, and weaknesses. They include all things pertaining to life and godliness; time and eternity; grace and glory. Let me make a selection, and judge of the whole by a part. Let me look at three of these promises—The first peculiarly the promise of the Old Testament—The second of the New—The third of both. The promised Seed. The promised Spirit. And the promised Land. O my soul, let me dwell on each of these till I am filled with wonder; and constrained to exclaim, "O how great is the goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!"

They are exceeding *precious* in their *estimation*. This does not regard all to whom these promises are addressed; for many make light of them, and neglect so great salvation. But there are others in whom it is fully exemplified. The promises are exceeding precious in the esteem of awakened and convinced sinners. A sense of our wants is necessary, to render all our supplies desirable and gratifying. The full soul loathes the honeycomb:

out to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet. It is owing to this that many read and hear the word of God without impression; and that the invitations of the Gospel, instead of being attractive, are rather offensive, being by implication a kind of reflection, like the offer of pardon to the innocent, or of alms to the wealthy, or of liberty to those who say, We were never in bondage. But when we see and feel that we are in the condition the dispensation is designed to relieve, the tidings will be glad tidings; they will be like cold water to a thirsty soul; they will be the break of day to one that watches for the morning. When weary and heavy laden, how precious is the voice that cries, "I will give you rest." I am lost, but here is a Saviour. I am sick and dying, but here is a Physician. I am guilty and weak, but here is One in whom I have righteousness and strength.

They are also exceeding precious in the esteem of real and confirmed believers. Let us go through the Scriptures, and we shall find how the saints always delighted in them. The patriarchs "embraced them"—kissed them, as the word is; "and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." David said, "I have taken thy testimonies as my heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart." "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Jeremiah said, "I found thy words and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." The noble army of Martyrs overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony, and loved not their lives unto the death. And now, in the soul of every Christian, "this is the victory that overcomes the world" "even" their "faith."

And no wonder they are in such estimation with them. They do not judge of them by report, but from experience. To a sense of want they have added the relish of enjoyment: and therefore as new-born babes, they desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, having tasted that the Lord is gracious. They have tried these promises, and can trust them. They repair to them as to wells of salvation from which they have derived refreshment in many a fainting hour. They have had proofs, blessed proofs of their influence and efficacy—First, in preserving them from despair, in bringing peace into their troubled consciences, and enabling them to joy in God under a sense of their guilt, unworthiness, and imperfections. Secondly, in supporting them amidst all the trials of life. For where is the Christian who cannot say, with David, "This is my comfort in mine affliction; thy word hath quickened me." Thirdly, in animating them in all the duties of religion. How often have they found "the joy of the Lord" which they have derived from them their "strength;" freeing them from fear, depression, and formality, and enlarging their heart to run in the way of his commandments! Fourthly, in promoting their mortification and sanctification. This is their ultimate design: "That by them we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the pollutions of the world through lust." For they are not only intended to afford us consolation, but to draw us from earth to heaven, from the creature to God, from the life of sense to the life of faith, and from the life of sin to the life of holiness. And Christians feel this effect from them far more than from the dread of wrath, or the authority of command, according to the language of the Apostle: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Are you an heir of promise? "O that I was! I know that these promises are exceeding great and precious; but they often make me shudder, lest I should come short of them. Oh that I knew whether I might claim them as my own!" Wait on the Lord, and keep his way. Pray for the testimony of his Spirit as he imparts it by his work in the heart and by his rule in the word. Observe the characters he has given of the subjects of his grace. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God"—

But if I am an heir, what is my duty with regard to these "exceeding great and precious promises?" It is to believe them. They are nonentities without faith. It is only by faith they can live and operate in the soul. It is to remember them. You should not have your resources to seek when you want them to use; but be of a ready mind to apply these divine encouragements as your various exigencies may require. It is to plead them before God. They are good bills, payable at sight. Present them, and say, Fulfil thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. It is to publish and recommend them. It is a good day with you; and if you hold your peace, some evil will befall you. Go therefore, and tell the king's household. Say to your relations, friends, and neighbours; O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Yea, to all

you find, say, with Moses to Hobab; "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

JULY 6.

"*Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back-side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him.*"—Exodus iii. 1, 2.

In the history of Moses we find three distinct periods. Each of them consisted of forty years. The first he passed at the court of Pharoah. The second as a shepherd in Midian. The third as the leader and ruler of Israel in the wilderness—So changeable often is human life—So little do we know at the commencement of our course what directions it will take, or what designs the Lord has to accomplish, either for us or by us! He giveth none account of any of his matters: but he says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Who can conjecture, when a child is born, however disadvantageous the circumstances in which he is placed, what are the destinations of Providence that await him! What a character was here! What wonders did he perform! What a space does he fill in the records of antiquity, as a deliverer, a commander, a lawgiver, an historian, and a prophet of the Lord! What a tax of admiration and gratitude has he levied upon all ages! Yet all this importance was once hid for three months in successive concealments, launched in an ark of bulrushes on the Nile, and by a concurrence of circumstances, apparently the most casual, discovered, saved, and advanced to glory, honour, and immortality!

God works like himself. He does indeed employ means: but while men depend upon their instruments, his instruments depend upon him; and he so uses them as to show that the excellency of the power is not of them, but from himself. When, without hire or reward, a whole nation was to be released from the iron grasp of the most powerful tyrant of the day, Who appeared before him with this sublime demand, "Let my people go, that they may serve me?" Not a trained soldier, not an experienced and renowned officer; but a shepherd, with no sword by his side, but only a crook in his hand, and no less than eighty years old, when, according to the language of his own beautiful psalm, our 'strength is labour and sorrow."

The place where he received this surprising commission was the neighbourhood of Horeb, a place rendered afterwards so famous and memorable. What a contrast between his condition at the foot of the same mountain *then*, and his state *now! Now* a solitary keeper of a few sheep; *then* king in Jeshurun, ascending up to meet the Most High face to face; receiving the mandates of infinite purity and rectitude written with the finger of God; and subsisting forty days and forty nights by the divine power! This must have been a most interesting spot to Moses.

It is worthy of observation that God in this manifestation found him usefully employed. The occupation indeed was lowly; but though a very learned man, and delicately brought up in a palace, he did not deem the keeping of sheep beneath him, when called to it by the providence of God. Humility is a lovely and blessed endowment. It enables a man to accommodate himself to events, and teaches him how to be abased, as well as how to abound; it leads him to exercise the graces, and perform the duties of the condition. For many who know what it *is* to be abased, do not know *how* to be abased. Their minds do not come down and harmonize with their circumstances. They are humbled, but not humble; and would rather break than bend. Yet is there any thing dishonourable in any kind of honest labour? How much more respectable is a profession, or a calling, however common, than what Bishop Sanderson said were the plague and disgrace of the country in his day, (what would he have said had he lived in ours!) beggary and shabby gentility? Hands were given us not to be folded, but used. Adam was placed in Eden to dress and to keep the garden. Seneca says, "I would much rather be sick than idle." As the employment of Moses was not degrading, neither, we are persuaded, was it found uncomfortable. Lord Kaimes says, "there is no drudgery upon earth but admits of more enjoyment than the ennui resulting from indolence and inaction." We have much reason to believe that Moses felt these to be the most privileged years of his life. How much more free and happy was the shepherd of Midian than the courtier in Egypt, and the leader and commander in the wilderness! Here by the side of his innocent charge he held communion with his God, was inspired to write the book of Genesis, and to tell how "the earth sprang out of chaos"—And here some have concluded he composed the delightful drama of Job, to encourage and comfort his suffering brethren in Egypt. However this may be, the subject adds another instance to the numerous cases mentioned in the Scriptures, in which, when the Lord appeared to communicate a discovery, or confer a distinction, the recipients were engaged in discharging the duties of their stations in life—Indeed where can we find an exception

from the rule? Satan loves to meet men idle. God delights to honour diligence and fidelity. He is with us while we are with him. "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath."

JULY 7.

"*And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.*" —Exodus iii. 2.

This exhibition was not only miraculous, but very significant. It was intended to strike the mind through the senses, and as an emblem to be instructive in at least four circumstances. Observe the *substance* of the figure. Not a fine tall tree, not a cedar or cypress, but "a bush," a mere bush—perhaps a bramble bush. Such is the image of the Church. If numbers, and riches, and splendour, and power be the marks of the true Church, as popery has often professed, where in many ages of the world could it be found? Seldom under the Old Testament dispensation; never under the New. At one time it was in the ark, and there was a wicked Ham. At another in the family of Abraham, and there was a mocking Ishmael. It was now in Egypt, consisting of slaves and brickmakers. If we go forward, our Saviour had not where to lay his head. His followers were the common people. His Apostles were fishermen. They could say, years after they had been endued with power from on high, "Even to this very hour, we hunger, and thirst, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; we are accounted the filth and offscouring of all things." Paul could make this appeal to the Corinthians: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." And when James addresses the admirers of the golden ring and the goodly apparel, he shows them that if they would follow God *he* would lead them in another direction: "Hearken, my beloved brethren; Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" The Church is indeed glorious, but she is all glorious within. Her excellences, like the weapons of her warfare, are not carnal, but spiritual. Natural men therefore do not discern her worth and dignity—"The world knoweth us not."

Observe the *condition* of the bush. It "burned with fire." Fire is one of the most common things in the Scripture to denote severe suffering. Hence it is said, "Glorify ye the Lord in the fires." "I will bring the third part through the fire." What was the state of the Jews now in Egypt? They were enduring every kind and degree of degradation and anguish, and their lives were bitter by cruel bondage. "The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." Yet what were their sufferings compared with those of many of their brethren in later ages? It is to the Jews the Apostle refers when he says; "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." And when addressing the Hebrews who were converted and christianized, the same writer says; "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." We also should do well to reflect on the condition of our ancestors, and be grateful for the exemptions with which we are favoured. Yet there is a sense in which if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus he shall suffer persecution. With us indeed the hand is tied; but the tongue can no man tame, and the carnal mind is enmity against God. And no toleration act can prevent our having tribulation in the world; or preclude personal and relative afflictions: and these may subserve the purposes of persecution properly so called. We have known individuals who have suffered in private life more than many martyrs; some of them enduring the pressure of grief week after week, and month after month, without notice; and others unable to divulge the source of their distress—a heart's bitterness known only to themselves. Christians are never to consider "fiery trials" as strange things. Of how many can God say, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction!"

Mark its *preservation*. Though burning, "the bush was not consumed." What a commentary on this part of the subject are the words of the Apostle: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus

might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." And what an exemplification of this language is the history of the Church! Though always exposed and assailed, it has continued to this day. Other cities have perished and their memorials with them. Empires have disappeared. The four universal monarchies have mouldered away, and their dust has been scattered to the four winds. But the Church is not only in being, but flourishing, and advancing, and going to fill the whole earth. The oppositions it has met with have been overruled for good, and have turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel. As it was with the natural Israel, so it has been with the spiritual; the more oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew: and the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Our hearts never tremble for the ark of God. It is in safe keeping. He whose cause it is, is the Almighty; and he loves it infinitely better than we do. We never sympathize with the cry, "The Church is in danger." We know it is not in danger—It cannot be in danger while his word is true; "On this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And this is as true of every individual believer as of the whole Church collectively. Not one child from the family, not one sheep, not one lamb from the fold, ever has been or ever shall be lost. "They shall never perish." Though the righteous fall, they shall not be utterly cast down. They may be chastened of the Lord, but they cannot be condemned with the wicked—There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Mark the *cause* of its security. Fire devours, and the bush was combustible. Why then was it not burnt? The "angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush;" or, as it is subsequently expressed, "The LORD saw that Moses turned aside to see, and God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." While this leaves no doubt of the divinity of the Being who displayed himself, so it explains the mystery of the continuance of the bush, and of the perpetuation of the Church typified by it—"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." God's presence with his people is a delightful reflection; and it is founded in the most perfect certainty. He is with them always; with them in their lowest estate; with them in all their dangers and afflictions; with them to pity them, to assist them, to support them, to preserve them, to deliver them. "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." To change the metaphor of our text, but keep the meaning; when the storm arose in the lake of Galilee, the disciples were thrown into a needless alarm—"Carest thou not," said they, "that we perish!" Perish! How could they perish? Was not He on board? And if so, his safety insured theirs. He could not sink, and therefore they could not. And see how they derived from his presence not only security, but immediate and full deliverance—"He arose and rebuked the wind; and there was a great calm."

We cannot conclude without adverting to the notice Moses takes of this event in the dying benediction which he pronounced on the tribes of Israel. When he came to Joseph, he said, "Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the precious things of the earth, and the fullness thereof, and FOR THE GOOD WILL OF HIM THAT DWELT IN THE BUSH." The scene, though it had passed forty years before, vividly rushed upon his imagination, and he derives from it the greatest good he could implore, whether for a nation or a man only. What pains we take, and what sacrifices we make, to gain "the good will" of a fellow-creature, which, if attained, can do nothing for us in our greatest exigences and interests! But "the good will" of him that dwelt in the bush—a tried God, a covenant God, a God who there said, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob"—this can sweeten every comfort, soften every sorrow, take the sting out of death. This can accomplish every hope. This satisfy every desire. "Think upon me, O my God, for good."

JULY 8.

"*I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly.*"—Zeph. iii. 18.

THIS "solemn assembly" was the convocation of the people for worship, especially in the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles. In these, thrice a year, all the males were to appear before God in the place which he should choose. This was Jerusalem. It was therefore named "the city of their solemnities." Here, at such seasons, they were always to "rejoice before the Lord." The services indeed were all of the festive kind; and "joy becomes a feast"—

> "But we have no such lengths to go,
> Nor wander far abroad;
> Where'er the saints assemble now
> There is a house for God."

Yes, we have our solemn assemblies as well as they; and surely we have not less reason than they had to be joyful, and to say, "Let us serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing." Yea, if we are habitually strangers to pleasure in religious services; if we cannot call the Sabbath a delight; if we are not glad when they say to us, Let us go into the house of the Lord; if we do not rejoice at his word as one that findeth great spoil; if spiritual duties are not in some good degree spiritual privileges, there is surely enough to awaken apprehension of our state before God.

We never apply the term "solemn" to any common or merely secular assembly; but only to one that has something in it sacred, and capable of inspiring awe. And what can be more venerable, grand, and impressive, than the assembling together of a number of immortal beings, in the presence of the Lord of angels, to engage not in any of the affairs of this world, but in those which concern the soul and eternity, and the consequences of which will affect us for ever! Well therefore may we exclaim with Jacob; "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." Let us impress ourselves with the thought when we are repairing to the sanctuary. Nothing will tend more to preserve us from a roving eye, and a wandering heart; and nothing will conduce more to our profiting by the means of grace, than our engaging with a serious and thoughtful frame of mind. David therefore said, "In thy fear will I worship towards thy Holy Temple." It is the more necessary because of the frequent return of these solemnities: if familiarity does not always breed contempt, it must always tend to reduce veneration.

But what caused these pious Jews to be "sorrowful!" See how they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. Their metropolis was destroyed, their palaces were demolished, strangers possessed their fields and vineyards: but though their calamities were great and numberless, nothing distressed them in comparison with the destruction of the temple, and the loss of their sacred institutions. They were "sorrowful because of the solemn assembly." This was now broken up and dispersed. Ah! said their aching hearts, "Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations." We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long." "Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers worshipped, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

Blessed be God, *we* cannot be thus sorrowful for the solemn assembly. Our temples are standing, our Sabbaths are continued, our eyes see our teachers, our ears hear the joyful sound; we sit under our own vine and fig tree, and none makes us afraid. Yet we ought, and if we are spiritually minded, we shall on many accounts be sorrowful for the solemn assembly. Sorrowful when deprived of opportunities of being found in it. This may be the case owing to the calls of urgent business, or accident, or sickness, or relative affliction. When indeed we are thus providentially detained, the Lord will not leave us comfortless: yet when we remember these things, we shall pour out our souls in us; for we had gone with the multitude, we went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. Sorrowful that it is so little attended. Many so undervalue the privilege as to suffer the most trifling expense or impediment to keep them from the courts of the Lord. Sorrowful that it is so little improved. How many attend frequently and regularly who receive the grace of God in vain, and are no wiser and better for all their advantages! Sorrowful that it is so impoverished and declining—That there is less spirituality and fervour; that we do not see the children instead of the fathers; that while the old are removed, so few in early life are coming forward to fill their places; that so few are led to inquire what must I do to be saved; that so few increase with all the increase of God. Sorrowful that it is dishonoured and degraded—By apostasies, backslidings, inconsistencies, and falls in the members of it; so that the enemies of the Lord blaspheme, and the way of truth is evil spoken of, and the Redeemer wounded in the house of his friends. Hence it is here added, "to whom the reproach of it is a burden." All this "is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation."

Yet if we feel the distress, it is a token for good. It is godly sorrow. And blessed are they that thus sorrow—For, says God, "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly." This means, with regard to these Israelites, that they should be united again from their dispersion, and led back to enjoy their former privileges, and again see his power and glory as they had seen him in the sanctuary. With regard to other sorrowers the Lord will gather them in two ways; gather them for safety, and gather them for glory. Moses said to Pharaoh, upon his announcing the plague of hail, "Send now, and gather thy cattle, and all that is in the field:" that is, house them from the storm. Thus the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and affords them a safe and comfortable retreat from the weather and the birds of prey. Our Lord uses this image; and David had also said, "He that dwelleth in the secret

place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." What an encouragement is this in times of public and general calamity! Indeed without it we should not be able to live a day in quiet from the fear of evil. The husbandman, when the grain is ripe, gathers the wheat into the barn. The bridegroom is said to go "down into the garden to gather lilies." It is thus the Lord, when they are made meet, removes his saints from the Church below to the Church above, and from earth to heaven, by the hand of death. Thus they are continually gathering one by one to their own people. At length he will send forth his angels, and will gather together his elect from the four winds; and the aggregate will be perfect. To this the Apostle refers, when he says, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him."

Two things result from hence. First—That sensibility attends genuine religion. The Lord takes away the heart of stone out of our flesh, and gives us a heart of flesh. Secondly—Nothing is more pleasing to God than a feeling, lively, public spirit, that will not only allow of our looking on our own things, but also on the things of others, and especially the things that are Jesus Christ's. If we have no concern for the welfare of Zion, we are not living members of the mystical body. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love thee."

JULY 9.

"*Are the consolations of God small with thee.*"
Job xv. 11.

They are not so in themselves, nor have they been so in the experience of many. Many have found them sufficient to wean their affections from the vanities and dissipations of the world, to set their hearts at rest, and to sustain them under every loss: when they have walked in the midst of trouble these have been able to revive them; and in the multitude of their thoughts within them *his* comforts have delighted their souls. Nor can they be small in the estimation of any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. But some know their fuller value from the want, rather than from the possession. They have had indeed relishes of them; but as to habitual enjoyment, the consolations of God *are* small with *them*.

But is there not a cause? And should not serious inquiry be made after it? The cause cannot be found in the God of all comfort. We are not straitened in him. All the fullness of God is before us. "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness?" Sometimes the reason is the indulgence of something incompatible with the will of God. This injures our peace and joy, as the worm affected Jonah's gourd: the cause was not visible, but it was real, and while the refreshful shade was withering over his head, a worm was working at the root. The boughs and leaves were some way off from the mischief, but they felt the influence in every pore, and for want of vital communication could no longer resist the scorching sun. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. There was an Achan in the camp that troubled Israel; therefore they could not stand before their enemies. Our obedience will be imperfect as long as we remain here, but it must be impartial. We shall rue for any reserve we make: and can only be preserved from shame if we have respect unto all his commandments. When Joab was assaulting Abel, he said to the wise woman, I do not wish to destroy this mother city in Israel; but a man, Sheba by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king—Throw his head over the wall, and the siege shall be instantly raised: and so it was. Let us therefore search, and try our ways, and resolve to act faithfully by the discovery.

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be;
Help me to tear it from thy Throne,
And worship only thee.

"So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road,
That leads me to the Lamb."

And be it remembered that the evil we are speaking of may regard not only some sin committed, but some duty neglected. One complainer perhaps holds back that which restitution requires. Another perhaps forgives not his brother his trespasses. A third does not reprove his neighbour, though he sees sin upon him.

Neglect in attending divine ordinances will furnish a reason. When by the Providence of God we are deprived of these, or of the ability to repair to them, we shall find that there is not an essential connexion between grace and what we call the means of grace. He will be with us in this trouble, and we shall see his power and glory, so as we have seen him in the sanctuary. But it is otherwise when having the opportunity in our hands we are found absent. We then transgress the command which forbids us to forsake the assembling of ourselves together; we put a slight upon the Lord's own appointment; and show a disregard to his presence and blessing. The hand of the diligent maketh rich: and they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. How much did Thomas lose in being absent from the Apostles when the risen Saviour appeared in the midst of them! How often have we heard persons re-

mark, that when they have been absent from their places, the text or the sermon has touched the very subject they wished to hear; and it is not improbable that something was then lost which might have confirmed or comforted them through life.

Ignorance of their privileges has also its influence. Many labour under great difficulties for want of evangelical instruction; and some who have many advantages are yet very obscure and perplexed in their views of the grounds of their acceptance before God, and of the certainty of their persevering in the divine life; and also of the nature and design of afflictive dispensations. Persons may be safe, and feel little of the glorious liberty of the sons of God; for this depends on knowledge: "ye shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "Blessed are the people who *know* the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance, in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness they shall be exalted."

To this we may add, separation from godly intercourse. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Paul was sad; but when he saw the brethren, he thanked God and took courage. "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." Thus two are better than one. A Christian will often be tempted to imagine something singular in his views and feelings, especially those of a sorrowful kind; but a fellow believer will be able, by opening his experience, to turn the stumbling-block into a way-mark, and convince him that all the subjects of divine grace have passed through the same exercises. Having seen the treachery of his own heart, a Christian is afraid of any encouragement offered from that quarter, till he has consulted with a wiser than himself in the things of God. His own prayers seem not to deserve the name of grace or of supplication, but he is cheered by learning that he has an interest in the petitions of those who have power with God, and can prevail.

But finally, what says James? "Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask and have not, because ye ask amiss." And what said the Saviour to his disciples? "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive; that your joy may be full." Therefore open your mouth wide. Therefore pray not according to the sense you have of your unworthiness—this would strike you dumb; but according to the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards you by Christ Jesus. Think of the unspeakable gift; and having boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him, say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us *all things?*

JULY 10.

"*And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*"—Heb. vi. 15.

The person spoken of is Abraham. The promise is contained in the preceding verses, and was delivered in the form of an oath. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." He had obtained the promise itself long before; but the meaning is, that he at length obtained also the fulfilment.

Now they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. He was called the friend of God; and they are all precious in his sight, and honourable, and he has loved them: and of each of the sons it will be said in due time as it was of the father of the faithful; "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

The believer's dependence and expectation are placed upon the promise of God. He would have nothing to sustain his hope, but for some divine intimation and assurance. God therefore from the beginning spoke in a way of promise; and in a way of promise he always deals with his people. He could have done for them all that he purposed to do without announcing it previously, but then they could have derived no advantage from it beforehand; and as they could not have known it, they could not have trusted in it, and acted upon it, and pleaded it in prayer, saying, "Do as thou hast said." A promise is more than a simple declaration: it is an express engagement by which a man lays himself under an obligation, and does not leave himself at liberty to act indifferently. And this, with reverence, applies to the conduct of the Supreme Being. But it is obvious that God's promising must have originated in his own undeserved goodness: for not only are his promises exceeding great and precious, but we were not worthy of the least of all his mercies and of *all the truth* which he has showed unto his servants. Yea, while we had no claims upon him, he had claims *against* us; and could righteously have punished us as transgressors. Let us only imagine that God had not as yet spoken concerning us at all, but was about to do it; conscious of our guilt, we could have expected nothing, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment; and, like Adam and Eve, hearing the voice of God, we should have endeavoured to hide ourselves for fear. But be astonished, O heaven, at

this, and wonder, O earth; he is good and ready to forgive! and comes forward and assures us that the thoughts he thinks towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil! and that all things are provided and ready for our relief!

As soon as we are born of God we are his children, and if children, then heirs; and as such we have a title which no enemy can invalidate to all the promises. But the promises are not always immediately accomplished, and hence a period of "patient enduring" is necessary. God indeed is not slack concerning his promise: he is never a moment beyond the appointed season. Yet, according to our wishes and apprehensions, he seems to delay: for ignorant of *his* time, we often fix one ourselves, and thereby not only show our folly and presumption, but expose ourselves to disappointment. When God promised Abraham a son, for many years he went childless. And how long did things grow more dark and discouraging before Joseph could see any probability of the fulfilment of his dream! It is often the same now in the history and experience of believers. Their prayers may seem disregarded. Their iniquities may prevail against them in the sense of their guilt, and in the stirring of their power. The battle may wax hotter and fiercer, and victory apparently decline. The land that is to be given them, measured by their feelings and fears, seems very far off: and they are frequently ready to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

This season of waiting is very trying, especially when the blessing is earnestly desired, and we are pressed down by outward trials. When it cometh, it is a tree of life; but hope deferred maketh the heart sick. During the suspense the enemy is busy to produce distrust and despair, and to lead us to say, Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? But, in opposition to this, faith will whisper, "Wait on the Lord," and, "Be of good courage." It is good for a man not only to hope, but "quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." It will keep him from entertaining those hard thoughts of God which always furnish bitter reflections after he has appeared to our joy; and also prevents our using unhallowed means to help out our eagerness—like Rebecca, who though she knew the elder was to serve the younger, in her impatience had recourse to injustice and lies to accelerate the event. He that believeth maketh not haste. He remembers how long he kept God waiting for him. He knows that the Lord's time is the best time; that every thing is beautiful in its season; that fruit is most wholesome and rich when it is fully ripe. He is also sure that he cannot wait in vain—for they shall not be ashamed that wait for him. For

No uncertainty attends the final accomplishment of his word. This Abraham found: "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." This the Jews found. At the end of four hundred and thirty years they were to leave the house of bondage: "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." He also engaged to give them Canaan for an inheritance. And therefore whatever difficulties opposed their passage and their entrance, it was at last acknowledged, "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." "Behold," says Joshua, "this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." Solomon also at the dedication of the temple bore the same testimony to the veracity of God: "Thou spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day."

Let us then be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Let us remember that all his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus; and that every thing in his nature and in his character is a pledge for the execution. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"—And bring with it the triumph and the song; "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

JULY 11.

"*When* THOU WAST UNDER THE FIG-TREE, *I saw thee.*"—John i. 48.

BEHOLD here THE RETIRED ISRAELITE—"Thou wast under the fig-tree."

It is spoken of Nathanael. Some have contended that he was the same with Bartholomew. Others, with less plausibility, have supposed that he was the bridegroom of the marriage at Cana in Galilee. He is once mentioned, along with some of the disciples, at the sea of Tiberias, in the close of this Gospel. With this exception, all we know of him is from the chapter before us. Philip had the honour of introducing him to the Son of God: "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael in reply said unto him, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." His objection

shows that his knowledge was small, and his prejudices vulgar. But his compliance proved that he was open to conviction, and willing to examine. And this accords with the character given of him by our Lord. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" By calling him an *Israelite* he distinguished him from his own nation: for all were not Israel who were of Israel. He was a Jew inwardly, whose circumcision was that of the heart in the spirit. He was not free from infirmity, but devoid of hypocrisy, and upright before God and man. Conscious that he had never been with Jesus, he asks with surprise, "Whence knowest thou me?" And Jesus answered, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree."

The fig-tree was the place of his retreat. It was probably in a garden, forming by its foliage a kind of natural alcove. It was chosen by Nathanael, not only because its large leaves would screen him from the rays of the sun, but conceal him from human inspection. For he wished to be alone. We may be alone in company. Who has not endured the solitariness of being with persons of no congeniality with their own views and feelings, who have checked and chilled every favourite sentiment, and rendered every attempt to introduce pious discourse like putting a tender exotic plant out into the frost and snow? But through desire, a man having separated himself seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. The place is not always optional. The poor are to be pitied who have no conveniency for retirement; and they are still more to be pitied who, by reductions in life, have been deprived of the accommodations they once enjoyed—If they are Christians, there is nothing they will so much feel themselves. But where it is optional, the place is indifferent, any farther than it may usefully or injuriously affect us as to the object of our withdrawment. Many therefore prefer the apartment of a room. But others, instead of being distracted and diverted when abroad, are aided and impressed; their thoughts are quickened, their fancy is enlivened by the displays of wisdom, power, and goodness all around them; and they can easily rise from things seen and temporal to those which are unseen and eternal—They love the fig-tree; and the wood, the corn-field, the meadow, and the garden will bear witness to their devotion. Isaac was in the field at evening-tide to meditate; and Peter was praying on the house-top.

But what was Nathanael doing under the fig-tree? It was something significant, and which was instantly recalled. There are facts in the lives of all which are easily susceptible of remembrance. Some of them may be awful; and only a hint given, or a circumstance mentioned, will call up the colour in the cheek, or excite a pang in the conscience. Such to the seduced must be any reference to the place of allurement and ruin; and to the murderer the place stained with blood. But to pious minds there are spots delightfully and sacredly interesting, because they have been no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. Such was Beth-el to Jacob, and the hill Mizar to David, and the river of Chebar to Ezekiel, and Patmos to John, and the fig-tree to Nathanael. Though we know not in particular what was Nathanael's engagement, it was obviously something of a religious nature. He was probably reading the law and the prophets; or reflecting on some divine subject; or praying to the God of heaven: or more probably he was indulging in all these successively, or intermingling them together; for this is the business of retirement.

Nathanael we may be assured would not turn his back on the temple of God, or forsake the assembling of himself together, with those who keep holy day, as the manner of some is; and public worship has its own undeniable claims. But he found in secluded devotion four advantages and recommendations. The first regarded frequency. Public services are comparatively few, and they should be few; and they require much time; and the seasons must be fixed, and invariable, and known, for general accommodation. But opportunities for private devotion continually occur, and ask only the momentary convenience of the individual himself. The second regarded freedom. All company is a degree of restraint upon intimate associates. Friendship longs always to resign up itself more fully to its own object. It therefore deals much in secrecy: and this is peculiarly the case with the friendship between God and the soul. There are confessions proper only for his presence; petitions to be only poured into his ear; griefs to be lodged only in his bosom. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy." The third was self-acquaintance. Self-knowledge is the most important and difficult. Persons may live to be old, and yet be ignorant of themselves; and they may be much alone, and never meet with their own hearts, or morally converse with them. Yet surely retirement affords the best opportunity to try our state, to examine our character, to detect our mistakes, to learn our dangers, and to provide against them. The fourth was the greater evidence of religious principle. Motives of less purity may induce us to repair to places where there is much besides God to attract and to entertain, especially in the goodness of the singing or the eloquence of the preacher. It is no unusual thing in our day for the service of the sanctuary to be turned into an amusement. But it does not look like conviction, like a regard for the duty it

self, like real love to God, when we can readily go where God only is to be found, and we have only to transact business with him. If we were in company with a disliked individual, his presence would be tolerable if they were to continue; but if they were all to depart, and leave us alone with him, nothing would be so desirable as the door. O my soul, in similar circumstances would this be my case with regard to God and thee!

JULY 12.

"*When thou wast under the fig-tree*, I SAW THEE." John i. 48.

BEHOLD here THE OBSERVING SAVIOUR—"I saw thee."

Here was a *Divine* observer. For how did he see Nathanael in this concealment? Not by an eye of sense; or from the testimony of others; but by the attribute of omniscience. Accordingly it produced this belief in the mind of Nathanael, who was forced to exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." This perfection Peter ascribed to him when he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things." Nearness and distance, darkness and light, publicity and secrecy, are the same to him. How many proofs did he give in the days of his flesh that he "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." He assured John, "All the Churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." And he evinced his entire acquaintance with all their state, and the recesses of their experience. And in his times he will show that he has been about our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways, words, and thoughts; for he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

Here was an *approving* observer. His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth: but much of what he sees he abhors. He sees many alone, but God is not in all their thoughts. They abstract themselves from the world, but are still in it; and employ their leisure in trifling or mischief, or, as Isaiah expresses it, in "weaving spiders' webs, or in hatching cockatrice' eggs." But his heart was with Nathanael. Had his fellow-creatures peeped through the leaves of the fig-tree, and seen him now reading, now musing, now kneeling, and praying with strong cryings and tears, they would have pitied or despised him. But the Lord looked on with approbation: for "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." Nathanael himself thought meanly enough of his performances, and perhaps feared they would be rejected. But "the Lord is nigh unto all them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him: I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."

Here was an *acknowledging* observer. He not only saw and approved, but avowed his regard. He avowed it to Nathanael *himself* How must he have been affected, when he heard the sentence, "I saw thee!" Surely a blush spread over his face—But how would he be cheered and encouraged by such an assurance! "Ah!" you say, "*he* could hear his voice—But does he speak now!" Not with audible sounds in the air, or in visions and dreams—There only enthusiasm is hearkening after him. But he has access to the mind, and bears witness with our spirits. Many now living, like Enoch, have the testimony that they please God—He has said to their soul, "I am thy salvation"—"I have loved thee."

And he not only avowed his regard for Nathanael, but he avowed it *before others*. He might have taken him aside, or have whispered it to himself: but no; he owns and commends him in the presence of the whole party. It was a testimony to a private transaction, but it was publicly expressed; and the attention of the company was turned towards him previously for this very purpose, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee"—What an illustration was here of the truth of his own words! "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." Nathanael thus privately sought; and was thus publicly acknowledged—

And by whom? Not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. Seek the honour that cometh from him; and remember the way in which it is to be obtained: "Them that honour me, I will honour." He can make others take knowledge of them. He can make the Spirit of glory and of God to rest upon them. He can distinguish them by the care of his providence in common calamities. He can own them in their dying moments. And he will, he must confess them before his Father and the holy angels. The concealments of Christians are only partial and temporary. Their day is coming: it is the manifestation of the

sons of God. Yet a little while, and every cloud will be dispersed, and they shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Then the tears they have shed over their sins and infirmities, while they were deemed licentious in their principles; the prayers they offered for those who hated and persecuted them; the alms in which they suffered not the left hand to know what the right hand did; and all the sublime and the beautiful of religion that passed under the fig-tree, shall be not meritoriously, but graciously proclaimed before an assembled world. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God."

JULY 13.

"*And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*"—Rev. iv. 4.

A THRONE is for royalty, and reminds us of a king. The King here is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. He "hath established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all." He has indeed two thrones. The first we approach on earth. It is the throne of grace. This is the place of our sanctuary, and the source of all our relief. The way to it we know; and "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." The second we approach in heaven. It is the throne of glory. This is too bright and dazzling for us to behold in this weak state of flesh and blood—for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." But there is a relation between these two thrones: and if we visit and value the one, and can now say, "It is good for me to draw near to God;" we shall soon be introduced to the other, and "be for ever with the Lord."

These four and twenty elders were representatives, not of the ministers, but of the whole Church: the number being made up of the twelve Patriarchs, and the twelve Apostles; the former the emblems of the Jewish, and the latter of the Christian part of it.

We may observe the position of these favoured beings—Their seats "were round about the throne." God is the supreme good. With him is the fountain of life. He is therefore the centre of their attraction; and their happiness arises from their nearness to him.

We see their posture—They were "sitting." John also saw them "standing before the throne," and "falling down before the throne." All is necessary to do justice to the subject. Their standing is a posture of readiness for service; and they serve him day and night in his temple. Their falling down is a posture of self-abasement, reverence, and adoration. But sitting shows distinction and privilege. Sitting in the presence of the king, especially when upon his throne, was limited to great favourites or near relations. "When therefore Bath-sheba went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah, the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother." And the Lord Jesus not only calls his people his friends, but his kindred—"The same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Sitting is refreshment and rest—we sit when we come in from travelling or from toil. And they who die in the Lord, "rest from their labours." It is also the posture of festive enjoyment—in allusion to which it is said, "Many shall come from the East and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

We have also their apparel—They were "clothed in white raiment." They had complied with the Saviour's invitation, who had counselled them to buy of him white raiment, that they might be clothed: and we are informed what this was; "the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." This is two-fold. It is their *justifying* righteousness, of which Paul speaks when he says, "that I may be found in him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of faith." In this righteousness believers are not only absolved, but "exalted." They have more to appear in than Adam in Paradise: his righteousness was finite, theirs is infinite; his was the righteousness of a creature, theirs is "the righteousness of God."—And it is their *sanctifying* righteousness. We are required to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," by a participation of his qualities, and an imitation of his example. The Scripture speaks of "the garment of praise:" and of being "clothed with humility." When we read of "keeping our garments," and "not defiling our garments," the reference is to our religious principles, and actions, and habits, which cover, and defend, and distinguish, and adorn the mind, as vestures do the body. And to these John refers, when he says, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb:" for the righteousness of Christ needs no cleansing. But *their* obedience is defective and polluted, and needs a sacrifice to render it acceptable, and grace to render it rewardable.

Finally; we are informed not only of their dress, but of their dignity. Persons may be clothed and not crowned; and they may be crowned, but not with gold!—But these "had on their heads crowns of gold." The glory to which they are advanced is of the highest

degree, and of the most durable and valuable quality—"Such honour have all his saints." It shows the amazing goodness of God towards them; for originally they were nothing, and viler than the earth. They were guilty and depraved. But he not only spares them, but forgives them; not only relieves them, but enriches and dignifies them. What a contrast between their lapsed, and their restored condition! How low the one, how elevated the other! "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people."

Here is scope and food for ambition—true ambition—commendable ambition. Let us despise the grovelling projects and pursuits of men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Oh! says the Christian, the attainment seems incredible—But, unworthy as I am, it is not too great for me to expect—

> There shall I wear a starry crown,
> And triumph in almighty grace;
> While all the armies of the skies
> Join in my glorious Leader's praise."

JULY 14.

"*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*"
Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

"As the man is, so is his strength:" and as the man is, so are his desires. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Let persons therefore judge of themselves religiously, by their desires; and if the stream does not rise so high as they could wish, let them observe the direction in which it flows. Let them ascertain that their desire is to the Lord, and the remembrance of him; and the promise assures them, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Natural men live without God in the world. God is not in all their thoughts. If he attempts to enter their alienated mind, he is resisted as an intruder, and they say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. But the spiritual delight themselves in the Lord. Their language is, "Where is God my Maker that giveth songs in the night?" "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "It is good for me to draw near to God."

We here see the *strength* of David's desire after communion with God in the discoveries and operations of his glory and power in his house and ordinances. Stronger terms could not be employed to express it. But two things served to excite and enhance it.

First, his *present condition*—"My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, *in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.*" He was now driven out of his country, exiled from his inheritance, and deprived of the songs and services of Zion. And in this condition what does he only or chiefly mourn over! Not the loss of his domestic and civil advantages, but of his religious. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day." How, says he, I envy the Priests and Levites—"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." How I envy the companies that journey to Salim, whatever be the weather or the road—"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them; who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." How I envy the little birds that flee, and feed, and build near the sacred place—"Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God." There would my nest be—the home of my heart—"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

It has grown into a proverb, that we never know the worth of blessings till we know the want of them: and the poet sings—

> "How mercies brighten as they take their flight."

Thus sickness endears health. The Jews, who had always been murmuring against Moses, mourned for him when dead many days; and no doubt sincerely, and even the more because of their former conduct. A minister may not be neglected; but it is when his hearers look up, and see his figure no more in the pulpit, and when they can no more hang upon his lips—it is then they begin to think how they have improved his labours, and are prepared for the next interview; it is then they recall his sermons, and borrow, and transcribe the notes which others have taken down. Children may not have undervalued a mother: but the full estimation of her importance is not felt till her ears are closed to all their complaints, and their cares find no longer an asylum in her loved bosom—Upon this principle the Lord acts, and it will account for many of his dispensations. If we do not esteem, and are not thankful for his benefits, he suspends or withdraws them. He can

easily deprive you of any of those religious opportunities and advantages, from which you now suffer the most trifling excuses frequently to keep you. By the loss of hearing he can render you deaf to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Accident or sickness may confine you from the place where his honour dwelleth. Or a change of business or residence may fix you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is—

Secondly, his *former experience;* "To see thy power and thy glory *so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*" God is not confined to temples made with hands. His presence fills heaven and earth; and David had seen his power and his glory in all his works; but he knew the special grace of the promise, "In all places where I record my Name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And they who wait upon the Lord, and love the habitation of his house, have always had proof of this, and can say with David—"I have seen him in the sanctuary. I am not to be disputed out of the reality of my experience. I have found him there, and communed with him as a man talketh with his friend. The influence and effect of the intercourse have vouched for the nature of it. It was not delusion, or enthusiasm. It has rendered sin odious; it has weaned me from the world; it has drawn me heaven-ward; it has taught me to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to have no confidence in the flesh."

Others are strangers to this experience. It is what mere formalists and false apostates never knew. But it is an incomparable advantage to the possessor. It confirms his confidence in divine truth: he has the witness in himself. It tends to preserve him in the way everlasting; and serves to recall him when he backslides. For he may be allured and drawn away for a time by other lovers; but he can never lose the relish he has had in the enjoyment of his God and Saviour: and the remembrance will excite him and reproach him, and make him long for it to be with him as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon his head, and when by his light he walked through darkness; when as yet the Almighty was with him—"Then shall she say, I will go, and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." Yea, this will always serve as a stimulus to urge him on in following hard after God. A person might have been ready to say, If David had seen God, why was he not satisfied! But he was not satisfied *because* he had seen him. He did not indeed want more *than* God, but he wanted more *of* him. His enjoyment only increased his appetite, and his experience only provoked his desire—"To see thy power, and thy glory, *so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*"

But what brings others to the temple? What brings you? Is it custom? or curiosity? Do you come to please your connexions? or to appease conscience? It is surprising that some of you attend the service of the sanctuary so regularly and constantly as you do You never saw his power and glory there. You never prayed to see them before you went. You never inquired whether you had seen them after you returned. This has been the case with some of you twenty, forty years. Will such an attendance do for a dying hour? Where now are all the ordinances you have been favoured with? all the sermons you have heard? In the record of your guilt and condemnation, ready to be produced at the last day.

But a real Christian needs not threatening and authority to constrain him to attend the means of grace. He feels them attractive; he has found it good to be there—There he has found the house of God, and the gate of heaven, and can say—

> "I've seen thy glory and thy power,
> Through all thy temple shine;
> My God, repeat that heavenly hour,
> That vision so divine!
>
> "Not all the blessings of a feast
> Can please my soul so well,
> As when thy richer grace I taste
> And in thy presence dwell."

JULY 15.

"*The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid*"—Zeph. iii. 13.

Of the subjects of divine grace here spoken of we may remark—

Their number: "a remnant." A remnant is a small part compared with the whole. We should be liberal in our opinions of men, but we are not to sacrifice truth upon the altar of candour: and we should always speak, not from our feelings, but from our convictions; and always make our appeal to the law and to the testimony. Some think few are wicked enough to be turned into hell, and that very little is required to constitute a claim to eternal life. But the sentiment is very injurious. It allows them to be satisfied with the state they are in themselves, and keeps them from endeavouring to save their fellow-creatures, whom they view as safe already. Nor is it less false. Take the characters of real Christians as they are found in the faithful word, and compare them with those who are living around you, and how few will come up to the representations? And does not the Scripture tell us that they are "jewels," for their rareness as well as worth; that they are "a little flock, in a large field;" that they are "a garden" in a vast wilderness; that they are "as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uttermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof?" Strait is the gate and narrow is the way

that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Yet God has never left himself without witness: he has always had a people for his Name; and this has been our case as a nation; "for except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. But though the remnant has been small relatively, it has been considerable in the aggregate; and is now increasing; and will increase. We have seen great things; and our children will see yet greater; for "he shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

Of their sanctity: "they shall not do iniquity." This must be taken with some restriction. We would not plead for sin; but we must not oppose the testimony of God, which assures us that "there is not on earth a just man that doth good and sinneth not." "If we say we have no sin," says John, "the truth is not in us." And James says, "In many things we offend all." But they are not "workers of iniquity," and "evil doers." Sin does not reign in them; they do not obey it in the lusts thereof. There is no one sin in which they knowingly live. They hate every false way; and esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right. He that has "true holiness" cannot be satisfied without perfect holiness. He therefore prays to be sanctified throughout, body, soul, and spirit: and whatever falls short of this is matter of grief and humiliation to him.

Of their sincerity: "they shall not speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." A part is put for the whole; and the quality of their speech is designed to express the inward temper of their minds. They shall be Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile. Every thing is lies with God that does not accord with the state of the heart; and only an upright spirit can maintain a deceitless tongue. The fruit partakes of the nature of the tree. What is in the well will be in the bucket: what is in the warehouse will be in the shop. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Infirmity is not hypocrisy. They are not mere pretenders. They do not draw on a fine white glove over a filthy leprous hand. They are not like a painted sepulchre, fair without, and rottenness within. They are not mere actors on a stage; but are really what they appear to be. Their integrity is peculiarly known by this—there is nothing of which they are more afraid than self-deception. They therefore come to the light. They examine themselves by the rule of the word. They implore the inspection of God himself: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Of their privileges: "they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.' Thus their blessedness is expressed pastorally, and includes three things. First, pasture; they shall "feed." As his sheep are men, their food must be something intellectual and spiritual; and as they are new creatures, it must be something congenial with their new appetities. And we read of the provision of God's house, and of his people being satisfied with his goodness. The ordinances of religion are the places in which they are fed, but they are not the food itself. What says the Saviour? "I am the bread of life." "He that eateth me even he shall live by me." Secondly, repose; and shall "lie down." In an eastern climate, and in a warm day, how desirable would the refreshment of rest be? and therefore the Church says, Tell me, not only where thou feedest, but "where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" And this David enjoyed and acknowledged; he not only feedeth me beside the still waters, but he "maketh me to lie down in green pastures." I cannot explain this to you, if your own experience does not. I cannot enable you to comprehend what that peace with God is which they feel who are justified by faith; what that contentment is that springs from communion with an infinite good; what that dwelling at ease is which the soul realizes that casts its burden upon the Lord, and is careful for nothing. Thirdly, security: and "none shall make them afraid." Sheep are the most timid of all animals; every appearance and movement alarms them. And this is too much the case with those they represent. But things are spoken of in the Scripture according to their proper tendency and effect. The righteous are bold as a lion —that is, they ought to be so; their duty requires it: their principles justify it. Nothing should make them afraid; because nothing shall, nothing can injure them. God has amply provided for their confidence; and when they can apprehend it by faith, they can be in quiet from the fear of evil: they can "dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord? Visit me, O Lord, with thy salvation; and let me glory with thine inheritance.

JULY 16.

"*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.*"—Heb. vi. 19.

Among the advantages by which a Christian is distinguished, he is peculiarly characterized by the possession of hope. This hope is called "a good hope through grace:" and the goodness of it is to be seen in its utility and certainty.

The *usefulness* of it is here expressed by a metaphor. We have this hope, as "an anchor of the soul." It will be easy to show the simple force of the comparison. The ship is anchored even in the harbour or port to keep it from being driven while lading or unlading: and to this we liken the use of hope in the common concerns and engagements of the Christian life: without it we could not be fixed trusting in the Lord, but should be all fluctuation and unsteadiness; and instability is incompatible with excellency—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." But the main use of the anchor is to hold the vessel in rough and tempestuous weather, when the mariner is unable to steer without danger of running on rocks or quicksands. This world which we have to cross is a sea; and we shall be piteously mistaken if we reckon upon nothing but calms or breezes. Does the word of God encourage such an expectation? Does it not forbid us to consider storms as strange things? In all ages have not the afflictions of the righteous been many? And what is to secure them in persecutions, losses, troubles personal and relative, conflicts without and fears within?

> "Amidst temptations sharp and long,
> My soul to this dear refuge flies;
> Hope is my anchor firm and strong,
> When tempests roar, and billows rise."

He that walketh in darkness and hath no light is to "trust in the Lord, and to stay upon his God." This David recommended to others: "Let Israel hope in the Lord." This he enjoined upon his own soul: "Hope thou in God." This he approved from his own experience, for he had found it available: "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

We also read of the "patience of hope," because hope is necessary to cheer and sustain it. In nature there are wintery months between the sowing and the reaping. And in the Christian there is the prayer of faith, the work of faith, the fight of faith, the life of faith, the walk of faith, before he receives "the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul." Though all the promises of God are faithful, many of them are not immediately fulfilled. Here then patience is necessary, and sometimes "long patience." But we are naturally full of impatience; and therefore we should be in danger of giving up the case as lost, and saying, with the unbelieving nobleman, "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Did not this hope whisper, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart?" Wait I say on the Lord. Though he delays, he cannot refuse. The delay also is founded in kindness and in wisdom. The Lord is a God of judgment; and blessed are all they that wait on him. All *will* be well—all *is* well—"All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth."

But, says Cowper—

> "Dangers of every shape and name
> Attend the followers of the Lamb,
> Who leave the world's deceitful shore,
> And leave it to return no more."

Many of them therefore do not regard suffering only—There are the perils of indulgence, of ease, of agreeable connexions, of success in business, of wealth, of fame: and we know who hath said, "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Here again "we are saved by hope." What is the smile of a man to the honour that cometh from God only? What is earth to a better country, "even a heavenly?" How came Moses to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter? "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward." How came Abraham to "sojourn in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise?" "He looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Thus the Hebrews took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had a better and an enduring substance. Thus it is that we are preserved from the power of worldly temptations. Narrow and barren commons may urge the sheep to wander; but it is otherwise with the green pastures and still waters. Fill a Christian with all joy and peace in believing, and he has no room to "covet after evil things"—His exposure is when "the consolations of God are small with him."

But this hope, as an anchor of the soul, is "sure and stedfast:" and as to *certainty*, the truth far exceeds the figure. In other cases the anchor does not always save the ship, but the ship is driven from its holdings and dashed to pieces. But this hope always secures the Christian; there never was an instance in which it was known to fail. This is an incomparable recommendation. Nothing is so wretched as the disappointment of hope. And yet what is more common than the wreck of human expectation, with regard to all earthly things? But nothing can equal the disappointment of *that* hope which regards the soul and eternity! How dreadful for a man to live in expectation of all that God has promised, and come short at last: to go with confidence to the very door, and knock, Lord, Lord, open to us; and then hear from within, I never knew you—Depart! Yet such will be the issue of every *religious* hope but *this*. It is *this*, and this *alone*, that "maketh not ashamed;" and is as "sure and stedfast" as God himself can make it.

And therefore the thing is, whether we can say "*which* hope *we* have." It is not only desirable, but possible to know this. Only, in deciding, there is nothing concerning which we should be more careful. What reason can we show for having *this* hope in us? Have we any better evidence than "a form of

knowledge," or "a form of godliness," while we "deny the power thereof." How is this hope founded? Is the Lord our righteousness and strength its only basis? How does it operate? For a dead hope is no better than a dead faith. The hope of Christians is a living and a lively hope: it will induce us to value; to seek after; and long to enjoy and resemble the glorious object of it. "He that hath *this* hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

JULY 17.

"*And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*"—Acts xiii. 6—12.

When in their ministerial tour from Antioch Paul and Barnabas reached Paphos, they not only found there the celebrated temple of Venus, with all the sensualities attached to it; but had to encounter another and a peculiar adversary. There is no going on in the cause of God without opposition—for

> "Satan rages at his loss,
> And hates the doctrine of the cross."

And he never succeeds better than when he throws himself into worldly professors and false teachers; and employs fraud rather than force, and address rather than open persecution. When therefore Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, called for the Apostles, being desirous of hearing the word of God; Elymas the sorcerer withstood them, and sought to turn away the deputy from the faith, that is, from the hearing of it. A willingness to hear is often a token for good, even if for the time it does not arise from the best motive. It brings people to the pool where they are in readiness for the troubling of the water. They are in the way of the means; and faith cometh by hearing. We should therefore endeavour to bring people under the sound of the Gospel. We may learn our duty from the enemy of our souls. He does all in his power to keep people from hearing, especially the great. And with them he is often successful. They think it is proper for others, but excuse themselves, not considering that none need it so much because of their dangers, and because of the influence of their example.

—But what did Paul? Observe, First, his reproof. "Full of the Holy Ghost, he set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" We are not fond of hard names and harsh language; and there is nothing we should more guard against than mingling our passions in the cause of truth: "for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." The same actions require not only the same circumstances, but the same warrant. When therefore the Samaritans would not receive our Saviour when he was going up to Jerusalem, and James and John seeing this said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" he turned, and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Paul not only knew the depravity of this wretch, how he misrepresented their doctrine, and calumniated their designs; but he was "filled" with the Spirit as "a spirit of judgment and of burning;" he spoke in the name of the Lord, and as a prophet, whose appeal was sanctioned by the event. Observe, secondly, his denunciation. "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." The doom had five characters. It *corresponded with the crime*—Here was blindness for blindness; judicial blindness for criminal blindness. It was *suddenly* inflicted—"Immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness." It was comparatively *mild*—It was only the loss of sight: but Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead. It was *temporary*—He was not to "see the sun for a season." It was *useful*—Like other judgments at the beginning of the Gospel, it was to guard Christianity from abuse, and to awaken attention, that others might hear and fear, and turn unto the Lord. And as this was the design, so this was the effect of it—

—And we see that the word of the Lord is not bound. Men may show their malignity to it, but they cannot hinder its spread or its efficacy. Yea, their oppositions will be more than harmless, and turn out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel. Thus we here find the wrath of man praising God, by giving rise to a miracle which produced a growing effect on the mind of Sergius Paulus. What was

this effect? "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

First, "he believed." We know that there is a faith which is not saving and influential. It is the effect not of principle, but impression; evidence for the time overpowering doubt, but leaving the heart unchanged. James speaks much of this belief. And our Saviour often met with it. Thus "when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." How many are there now living who admit every truth their ministers teach into their judgments; but there they lie like bodies in coffins, dead being alone. We hope, however, this was not the case here; but that the deputy believed to the saving of the soul; not only assenting, but acquiescing, trusting in the Lord Jesus, and becoming his follower.

Secondly, he was also "astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Every thing was adapted to produce this feeling in *him*. The doctrine was perfectly *novel*. We who are familiar with it from our youth up, cannot well imagine how it must strike the mind of those to whom it is introduced for the first time! They may well be said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light. Yet there is a degree of this in every converted soul. Experience is very different from theory: and when we are taught of God we have other views of those very things of which we have read and heard before. The *nature* of it surprised him. It contained the deep things of God. Great is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh—One dying for all—He who knew no sin, made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him—Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith! How mysterious the scheme! And yet as pure as it is deep, requiring us to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to avoid the very appearance of evil. The *efficiency* also would strike him. He now viewed the Apostles as the oracles of God, and considered what they said as his word—and so it was—and he saw it was. For no sooner had Paul spoken than it was supernaturally accomplished. And this could be justly extended to every thing else: for "the word of God is quick and powerful." How much more of this can we see than he saw! Since then how mightily has it grown and prevailed! How has it banished idolatry—tamed the savageness of the multitude—comforted the desponding—changed the disposition of the ungodly—and enabled those who have every thing to enslave them to earth, to live with their conversation in heaven! What other doctrine has ever been so glorified?"

And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto us. Many despise it and turn from it. How do we regard it? Do we believe it? And does our life vouch for our faith? Can we say with David, "Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore thy servant loveth them." Some would consider a regard that rose to admiration and astonishment as weakness of mind. But it is more than justified by prophets, by angels, by God himself, who has magnified his word above all his name. How little and mean are other things at which we wonder! Here is enough to fix, and fill, and employ the mind for ever! But let us not be found in the number of those who "wonder and perish." Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into all truth, that we may know the excellency of it from its influence in ourselves, and recommending it to others, be able to say with John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

JULY 18.

"*And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.*"—Acts xv. 36.

Nothing can be more pleasing to a Christian than to study the life of our Saviour; to follow him from place to place; to hear him preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; to see him feeding the hungry, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and going about doing good. We may feel a considerable degree of the same pleasure in reading the acts of the Apostles. The Apostles in the Church of God were next to him in order of time, and next to him in dignity, and next to him in supernatural endowments, suffering, and usefulness. But in all things he must have the pre-eminence. He is fairer than the children of men. In following him we find nothing to scandalize or to distress. No censure ever attaches to his temper or conduct; he is always in character with himself as the Holy One of God; and we exclaim with the multitude, "*He* hath done all things well." But it is otherwise when we follow men, good men, great men, inspired men—"the best of men are but men at the best."

An instance of which comes before us this evening in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas. It will yield us several instructive meditations.

We begin with Paul's proposal to Barnabas

—"Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." The manner in which he speaks of the persons regarded is observable: he calls them "our brethren." Our Lord had said to his disciples, Call no man master, and be not ye called masters, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And they strictly adhered to the command. Paul does not avail himself of his office, talents, or success, to lord it over God's heritage. He exercised no dominion over their faith, but was a helper of their joy. The fraternal relation results from our very nature; for God has made of one blood all the nations of men, and they are all derived from one father, the first man, Adam—so that wherever I see a human being I see a brother. But the Apostle here refers to the subjects of divine grace. They are new creatures; they are born again; but they are born of the same Spirit, they are redeemed by the same blood, justified by the same righteousness, heirs of the same glory: and while partaking of "the common salvation," a communion subsists between them, unaffected by any difference of opinion, or distinction of circumstances.

These were universally esteemed by Paul; and he could say, "Grace be with *all* them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." But the persons he now wished to see were known to him and Barnabas. They had been blessed under their former ministry; for they had preached to them the word of the Lord before. It is natural for those who are spiritual fathers to feel a peculiar affection for their own offspring. If we have planted a tree, we feel interested in its life and growth. What wonder then that Paul should wish to water what they had planted; or that having sown the seed, he wished to see the blade, the ear, and full corn in the ear. And the state of things required their inspection. The first Churches were exposed to a thousand discouragements and dangers. How soon were the Galatians "bewitched" from the truth, and lost the blessedness they had spoken of! There were deceitful workers at Corinth, and one wretch, as specious as he was injurious, who transformed himself into an angel of light. At Ephesus, from among themselves arose men, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them. Wherever the good seed was sown, the enemy was sure to sow tares. It was natural therefore that Paul should be concerned to visit "every city" where they had laboured, to know their estate, to refute any error in doctrine, to oppose any corruption in practice, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to uphold the weak; and to help them much who had believed through grace—How well could he say, "That which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

See the zeal of this man of God—"Let us go *again* and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do"—He was never weary in well-doing. He made the end of one good work the beginning of another; and considered nothing done while any thing remained to *be* done. What he said of himself as a Christian applied equally to his character as a preacher and an apostle: "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." To those who were ignorant of the principle that actuated him in these "labours more abundant, and deaths oft," he appeared deranged; and he was so, when judged by the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God. But, says he, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Hence too when he mentions his losses and persecutions he adds, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

But Paul's zeal was always according to knowledge. Like the healthful heat of the body, it made him glow, but did not like a fever burn up his brain. No person of so much natural sanguineness of temper, and so much spiritual fervour, ever had so much prudence, or was so authorized from his own example to say to others, "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the fear of the Lord is"—Hence his wish here not to go alone, but to take Barnabas with him as before. He knew that two were better than one. If one fell, the other would lift him up again. If one was tempted, the other could warn him. If one was distressed, the other could comfort him. If one was perplexed, the other could counsel him. He remembered that his Lord and Master, in the mission of the Seventy, had "sent them forth two by two, into every city and place whither he himself would come." He also had said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

JULY 19.

"*And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.*"—Acts xv. 37, 38.

We have heard Paul's proposal to Barnabas to revisit together the scenes of their former travels and labour. Here we see the difficulty that occurred in the execution of it. The occasion of it was Mark, not Mark the evangelist, but John Mark. He was the son of the sister of Barnabas. When Barnabas and Paul carried alms from Antioch to Jerusalem, they brought this young man back with them: and when they were sent forth from Antioch to spread the Gospel, they also took him along with them. But when they came to Perga in Pamphylia, he left Paul and his uncle to pursue their journey, and returned to Jerusalem.

On the present occasion Barnabas wished to take him again: but Paul was unwilling. Both had their reasons. Barnabas hoped he had been humbled for his fault, and that in this second excursion he would wipe off the disgrace of the first. Besides, he was his nephew; and relative affection will often plead very hard. Paul reflected on our Lord's words; "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." He felt a very different spirit in himself; and deemed it right to notice a misconduct which, if tolerated in a public character, might be injurious by example. Perhaps both these good men erred a little; the one being too partial, and the other too severe. But with regard to the young man himself, we may observe two things. First, though we know not the particular reason for his delinquency, whether it was the attraction of home, (for he had a mother living in Jerusalem,) or the dread of difficulties and dangers in such a missionary life; he had done wrong in going back; and his declension not only affected his own reputation, but laid the ground of this disagreement and discord. How much depends often upon one mistake! We can never calculate the evils that may arise from it as to ourselves or others. Let us therefore walk circumspectly; and ponder the path of our feet, that our goings may be established.

Secondly, the severity of Paul and the kindness of Barnabas were probably blessed to him. It is certain that he acted a better part afterwards; for Paul had subsequently a good opinion of him; and was not backward to express it. Hence he says to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." "And Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments,) if he come unto you receive him." Hence we infer—That we should be moderate in our censures. We may have cause to blame an individual; but we know not what he may become. He that is now like a bruised reed may prove like a cedar in Lebanon; and he that is now only as smoking flax may flame for God, and kindle many others. We also learn—That those we have censured for their faults we should be forward to encourage and recommend upon their improvement. Many, when they have reflected upon a character, are delighted to find their reflections justified. This shows a littleness of mind and a vileness of heart. A man in proportion as he is truly good and great, will be glad to learn that he was mistaken in his moral forebodings. "Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

JULY 20.

"*And the contention was sharp between them.*" Acts xv. 39.

This was sad. Persons may differ, but agree to differ, leaving each other to be fully persuaded in their own mind. Abraham and Lot differed: but "Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." And the one nobly gave up; and peace was the reward. But here neither would yield; and "the contention was *sharp* between them." Good men are often less persuadable and manageable in disputes than others; and it is to be accounted for from their conscientiousness, and the greater importance they attach to their opinions. In these cases they may be, and very often are mistaken; but while they think the cause of truth, the advancement of religion, and the honour of God are involved in the side they take, we need not wonder that they feel a kind of martyr-firmness as well as zeal. None of our passions assume so much the pretence of rectitude as our anger: but when we are jealous for the Lord of hosts, what fervour and faithfulness should we not display! Even the advocates of the religion of the Lamb of God have pleaded with pens dipped in gall, and tongues which seemed set on fire of hell. But the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

Good men, and men eminently pious have their infirmities and imperfections. Even Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips. Elias also was a man subject to like passions as we are. When Paul and Barnabas had healed the cripple at Lystra, and were in danger of

being worshipped, they rent their clothes, and said, "Sirs, why do ye these things! We also are men of like passions with you." And had these intentional idolaters been now present, and witnessed this angry contention, they would have had proof of it; and have no longer said, "The gods are come down in the likeness of men." Many a sacrifice of praise and confidence that we are ready to offer to a fellow-creature would be spoiled by a little more intimacy with them—"He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Here we see, what we have many occasions to remark, the impartiality and fairness of the sacred writers. They give us no "faultless monsters;" but describe the failings as well as the excellences of the dearest servants of God. They are never afraid of the honour of religion on this account; neither should we—

But let us remember for what purpose such faults are recorded in the Scriptures. It is not to render us careless in our walk, or to palliate our miscarriages; but to warn and admonish us. I am not to say, when irritated into asperity, "Why Paul and Barnabas were hot and fierce too;" but to reflect on the weakness of human nature, and to learn my own danger—"If such men erred, let me beware." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Happy is the man that feareth always.

JULY 21.

"*They departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.*"—Acts xv. 39—41.

NOTHING could have been more unlikely or painful than this separation. Barnabas was of a most affectionate and tender disposition, and was called "the son of consolation." It was he that introduced Paul to the Christians at Jerusalem, and convinced them of his conversion when they were all afraid of him. They were peculiarly attached to each other. They had always been companions in travelling and preaching. How often had they taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company! How frequently had they united in holy exercises! Like David and Jonathan, they were knit together in love, and seemed to have but one heart and one soul—Yet they differ, contend sharply, and part! Who has not said in his haste, All men are liars! What can equal the pain that results from the disruption of friendship!

Yet the Lord can make the wrath of man to praise him. The separation of Paul and Barnabas was overruled for good, and "turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." Two missions now issued forth instead of one.

For the breach between them did not take them off from their work, or relax their zeal in the noble cause to which they were pledged. Only it is observable, not only that they moved widely from each other, but that each repaired to his native country; Barnabas sailing for Cyprus, and Paul travelling through Syria and Cilicia. Were they, in taking these directions, guided by the Holy Ghost, or did they follow their own prudence and inclination? The latter might not have been inconsistent with the former. The Spirit of inspiration often availed itself of common occurrences, and fell in with the natural views and feelings of the individuals favoured with it. Partial affections are not incompatible with general benevolence; but may be the very means of aiding it. A peculiar regard for a land in which we were born and trained up, among all the endearments of life, is natural and unavoidable, and deserving of encouragement: and it is certain that we cannot show our love to it in any way so nobly and importantly, as by endeavouring to promote the spread and success of the Gospel in it.

The manner in which they were dismissed to their new scenes of labour, reminds us of the practice and principles of the first Christians. They were men of prayer. They knew that our sufficiency for every trial and for every work was of God; yea, that even an Apostle could only be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might—and therefore "the brethren recommended them unto the grace of God."

But because this is spoken of Paul and Silas at their departure, and not also of Barnabas and John, some have inferred that the church of Antioch sided with Paul, thinking him in the right in this dispute, and blaming Barnabas for opposing him. But we are persuaded the sacred historian intended no such inference. Luke *mentions* only the dismission and recommendation of Paul, because it was *his* history he was engaged to write. But we have every reason to believe that they did the same for Barnabas when he left them, as they did for Paul. They would know that in every difference there is mutual, though there may not be equal blame. They would be alive to the excellences of both these men of God: they would be tender towards both; they would pray for both. They had perhaps endeavoured to be mediators, but they took care not to be partisans. There are cases in which neutrality is a virtue; and a man's greatest wisdom and excellency is to do nothing. And it is a very unreasonable thing when persons disagree, to think that others must be drawn into their quarrel; instead of retaining a regard for both, as far as each appears estimable. Let this remark be applied

not only to religious dissensions, but to quarrels among neighbours. Let us remember the words of the wise man, "He that passing by, meddleth with strife not belonging to him, is like a man that taketh a dog by the ears"—He will soon grow weary of holding him back, and if he lets him go, he will be snapped at.

—Did Paul and Barnabas part at Antioch to meet no more? We are not able to determine this. It appears, however, that if they did not meet again, they were reconciled; for some years after Paul thus speaks of him; "or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" Yea, we are persuaded they were reconciled before they parted. Anger may enter the mind of a wise man, but it "resteth only in the bosom of fools." Paul, who said to others, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," would not separate from Barnabas, perhaps for ever as to this life, without expressions of renewed attachment. And who, that ever tasted the pleasures of reconciliation, but wondered that he ever lived a day or an hour in the gall of bitterness and resentment?—Wherefore let us as much as possible live peaceably with all men. And if, as offences will come, a breach at any time is made, let us hasten to heal it, remembering that he who soonest yields is the conqueror, and that it is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

JULY 22.

"*Sanctify them through thy truth.*"
John xvii. 17.

As the Saviour intercedes for this sanctification, it shows us the importance of it. As he asks it for his own disciples, who were already called by his grace, and had continued in his word, we learn that it is a progressive work, and that we should not be satisfied with any present advancements we have made in it. Hence the admonition of the Apostle: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." God is the source and author of this sanctification; and therefore *his* agency is implored. But we are here reminded of the instrumentality he employs: "Sanctify them through *thy truth*." There is an emphasis in the appropriation—thy truth: for it is not every kind of truth that sanctifies; but the truth *of God*; "*the* truth as it is in Jesus." This is the means of our conversion, and therefore it is said, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And this also is the means of our progress in the divine life; and hence we read, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The Gospel conduces to our sanctification several ways:

First, by replenishing the soul with holy objects of contemplation. These, by filling the mind, keep out other things, and by their residing in it, produce assimilation. For we are always affected with subjects with which we are constantly familiar. When we are among little children, and fields, and meadows, and lambs, we acquire feelings of simplicity and innocency, to which we are strangers in our intercourse with the world. A man that dwells much upon gloomy images is soon tinged with depression and despondency. The miser by poring always on "sordid dust" becomes contracted, and mean, and base. Who does not feel his levities checked, and a soft sympathy seizing his frame, when he enters the house of mourning, and, for the time at least, knows, that "by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better?" Ideas of grandeur tend to elevate, and of purity to refine our sentiments. Hence one of the secrets of sanctification is to be very conversant with "the things of God," by reading hearing, and reflection.

Secondly, by presenting powerful motives. And what motives does it not employ? It addresses our fear, and lays all hell before the conscience. It appeals to our hope, and tells us of the things which God has prepared for them that love him. It speaks to our ingenuousness and gratitude. If we sin, it is against our best Benefactor and Friend. If we offend and grieve him, it is in sight of his dying anguish. Can I hear him saying, All this I freely endure for thee, and not cry, "Lord, I am thine, save me?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Thirdly, by the Spirit of holiness that attends it. His influence is necessary to the success even of his own word. Without it the suitableness and excellency of the means will be unavailing. The best objective representations and rational arguments will be counteracted by the depravity of the human heart, unless the Lord works with them. When the Apostles came to Antioch, "preaching the Lord Jesus," it was not the goodness of the subject that produced their success—"The hand of the Lord was with them;" and hence "a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." And Paul acknowledges the same in his epistle to the Thessalonians: "Our Gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Now this influence is confined to God's truth. This testimony he only gives to the word of his grace. And therefore the Apostle asks the Galatians: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hear-

ing of faith?" So we may ask any believer who is a new creature in Christ, What is it that proved the power of God to your salvation? What was it that humbled you in the dust, and yet enabled you to rejoice in Christ? That at once relieved you under a sense of guilt, and yet rendered you the enemy of sin? That raised you above the world, and yet made you content and useful in it? Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound.

Let us hourly praise the Father of lights, that to us is the word of his salvation sent. There is no true sanctification separate from it. Men may be amiable, and civil, and moral, and superstitious without it, but not holy. The truth and the life of God go together. We do not like a religion that rests in the word; and we suspect a religion that can dispense with it—"Sanctify them through thy truth."

JULY 23.

"*In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*"—Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3.

God hath both enemies and friends in the world. Hence his word abounds with threatenings and with promises: for he will deal with the one according to their desert, and they will have no reason to complain; and with the other according to the riches of his mercy and grace, and they will have much reason to be thankful. "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword, shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." But the dooming of the wicked need not alarm the Church: yea, destruction to the one is deliverance to the other—

Therefore it is added; "In *that* day sing ye unto *her*." Thus we see that the Lord is concerned for the welfare and encouragement of his people: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." But knowledge must precede comfort. How can they rejoice in privileges or prospects of which they are ignorant? Hence "it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace;" that is, with the doctrine of the Gospel. They that *know* his name will put their *trust* in him. Therefore it is said, "*Speak* ye comfortably to Jerusalem." And here, "*Sing* ye unto her. She is sometimes unable in a strange land to sing the Lord's song herself—Let others sing unto her—and as a babe is sung to sleep, let her fears, and cares, and griefs be soothed away—Let ministers—Let her fellow members cheer her—Let the public songs of Zion make her joyful in my house of prayer, that she may be filled with all joy and peace in believing."

Believing what? What she is—and what she may expect. First, what she *is:* "Sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine." A vineyard is one of the most common figures by which the Church is held forth in the Scriptures; and it is easy, just, and striking. It is to intimate that they are severed from the world, and formed a peculiar people. They are made to differ from others as wheat differs from tares, as flowers from noxious weeds, as a vineyard from a rude, barren wilderness. A vineyard is private property; in which the owner delights, and from which he derives profit. And the Lord's portion is his people. He has chosen them for his own inheritance. He has set them apart as godly for himself. He takes pleasure in them; and derives his praise from them. He is glorified when they bear much fruit.

But they are a vineyard of "red wine." That is, a vineyard whose vines yield the best fruit, and from which is extracted the richest juice, called in another place "the *pure blood* of the grape." The people of God are always spoken of in language which marks their value. Every thing is not only peculiar, but superior. They are more excellent than their neighbours. Have they peace! It is a peace which passeth all understanding. Have they joy? It is joy unspeakable and full of glory. The religion of others is only the produce of nature; and that which is of the flesh is flesh. But the Lord's people are spiritual. They are partakers of God's holiness. They follow the Lord fully. Their conversation is in heaven. Their speech drops as a honeycomb.

Secondly, what she may expect: "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." As the word feed, when applied to the Lord as a shepherd, intends not only his furnishing his sheep with food, but performing all the pastoral office; so *keeping* the vineyard here denotes all the work of the husbandman. Vines are very dependent growths; they require much attention. They must sometimes be pruned. The useless and injurious suckers, which would draw off the sap from the bearing boughs must be lopped off. I one day saw the gardener at this work—he seemed to be very free with the knife—and rather fearing for the vine, I inconsiderately said, "Are you not taking away too much?" "Sir," said he, "I know what I am doing." And recovering my confidence in him I left the execution to his own skill; and I had no reason to complain: the clusters justified him. Why do we not trust in the God of all grace? He does not afflict willingly but for our profit. His work is perfect, his ways are judgment. But observe what he *here* engages to do. His vineyard needs refreshing, reviving, and increase. And he will "water it;" water it by his word, his ordinances, and his Spirit—and water it "every moment." No other vineyard needs this—

but what would be the consequence if God was *ever* to withhold the influence of his grace from *us?* His vineyard is exposed: and to what purpose would the culture of it be, if the fences were broken down, and wild beasts of the desert could enter and devastate? But they have a vigilant and almighty Protector, who, "lest any hurt it, will keep it night and day." Keep it *constantly—night* and *day.* Keep it *completely*—lest any *hurt* it—not only lest any *destroy* it, but *injure* it! How well are they kept who are kept by the power of God!

What condescension and kindness are here! —That the *Lord* will do all this! Lord, what is man that *thou* shouldest magnify him—that *thou* shouldest set thine heart upon him!

Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest to thy people. "If I am a vine in thy vineyard, no one seems so low, so weak, so unflourishing, so unpromising as I am. Return, I beseech thee, O God—Look down from heaven—and Behold and—Visit this vine."

JULY 24.

"*The Father loveth the Son.*"—John iii. 35.

THIS is obviously spoken in a way of emphasis and distinction. "God is love." We find in him a love of common bounty—This leads him to provide for us as creatures that he has made; for the eyes of all wait on him; and he satisfieth the desires of every living thing. We find in him a love of benevolence, called in the Scripture mercy and grace—This regards us as fallen creatures, and appears in the provision he has made to relieve our guilt, misery, and helplessness. We see in him also a love of complacency—In this he respects us as renewed creatures. For complacency takes in approbation, and esteem, and delight: and this God can only feel towards the regenerate: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion has light with darkness? But the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. And *they* stand in the same bond, and will share in the same condition with the Saviour himself—They are "joint-heirs with Christ"—they "shall be glorified together." And therefore in his prayer for his followers, he says, "I have declared unto them thy Name, and will declare it, that the love which thou hast towards *me* may be in *them.*"

Yet though the love of the Father to his people be the same with the love he bears to his Son, it is the same in kind only, not in degree—He is "the first born among many brethren," and "in all things he must have the pre-eminence." There is therefore a peculiar significancy in the assertion; "The Father loveth the Son." This love is founded in three things. First, likeness. A measure of this resemblance is found in all Christians. Hence they are said to be "renewed after the image of him that created us in righteousness and true holiness." But the likeness is not complete. There are remains of depravity in all of them, while they are here; and they acknowledge and mourn over their deficiencies. But he was the image of the invisible God: the express image of his person. "In him was no sin." The prince of this world came, but found nothing in him to work upon. The stirring up of the water brought up no mire and dirt, because there was nothing but purity at the bottom.

Secondly, obedience. He was the ten commandments embodied, and alive, walking up and down the earth for three-and-thirty years —"I delight," said he, "to do thy will, yea thy law is within my heart." "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And as his obedience was cheerful, so it was unvarying. "He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." He relaxed not when the divine pleasure required him to agonize in the garden, and die upon the cross. And therefore he said as he was closely moving towards them: "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." He was sensible to the suffering, but he turned not away his back: he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:" but he prayed, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Well therefore could he say at last, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

Thirdly, the devoting himself to die for the recovery of sinners. "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It was an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. God has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. He delighteth in mercy. He loves to see *us* relieving the needy, and visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. He is still more pleased to see us reclaiming the vicious, and saving souls from death: and he tells us that they who turn many to righteousness shall shine like stars for ever and ever. How then did the Father of mercies, the God of all grace, regard *him* who, self-moved, without our desert or desire, interposed to redeem a guilty world from the curse of the law; and gave himself a ransom for all! "The Father loveth the Son"—

—And can we want *proof* of this? What may we not bring forward as an evidence of it? Witness his expressions. At his transfiguration a voice came out of the cloud, say-

mg, "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him." At his baptism a voice from heaven said. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Yea, ages before, he said, by his holy Prophet, "Behold my servant whom I uphold: mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." Witness all the arrangements he made previously to his birth. All had a designed reference to him. If a succession of prophets was raised up, it was for his sake. "To him gave all the prophets witness;" and "the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy." If an economy of numberless sacrifices and ceremonies was established, it was for his sake—every thing prefigured him: "the law was a shadow of good things to come, of which the body was Christ." If revolutions convulsed the world or the Church, it was for his sake—"I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord." All the dispensations of providence and grace, like so many streams, flowed into this confluence, and made his appearance the fullness of time. Witness the supernatural attestations by which he was honoured. In his birth, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, he "was approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs." Witness the intimate revelations made him, and by which, though he never learned letters, he surpassed all the human race, and had in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. "For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." Witness God's appointment that all blessings should come to us through him, and that we should always implore them for his sake and in his name. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." In your applications remind him of me, and he will never deny you. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Witness the exaltations to which he has advanced him, and the treasures he has conferred upon him. He has "crowned him with glory and honour;" and "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given *all* things into his hand."

Let *us* then love him, and be followers of God as dear children. *He* cannot lead us astray: and we must walk in the light as *he* is in the light. How blind must we be to see no comeliness or beauty in One whom *he* values infinitely more than the universe! How depraved must we be to feel indifferent to a Being possessed of such greatness and goodness, and who has done and suffered so much for us! What wonder the Apostle should say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." But if I loved him, should I not think of him? should I not speak of him? should I not love to hold communion with him? should I not love to please and serve him?

JULY 25.

"*He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*"—Acts xi. 23.

Though Barnabas was the son of consolation, he not only aimed to comfort his hearers, but could say, "I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." He had seen the grace of God in the Christians at Antioch, and was glad. But he knew that it was not enough to begin well. The end proves and crowns all: he only that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. But if any draw back, God's love shall have no pleasure in him. He believed in the stability of the everlasting covenant, and was confident that he who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; but he knew how to apply his own principles. He knew that the appointment of the end insured the use of the means, and as much precluded a diversion from the one as the failure of the other. He knew also that those who cannot apostatize may backslide. On every ground he knew warnings and admonitions to be proper, useful, and necessary; and therefore he exhorted them—

Observe the aim of the exhortation—He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would *cleave unto the Lord.* With the first preachers of the Gospel he was all in all; and the subject of all their practical addresses therefore was, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to walk in him." "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith." They knew that he alone was equal to all their exigences, and that their religion prospered only as they maintained an habitual and supreme regard to him. Had we heard Barnabas explaining his admonition, we should have found him urging the brethren to adhere to him—as their teacher, who should lead them into all truth; as their Saviour, whose blood cleansed them from all sin, and whose righteousness justified them before God, and gave them access with confidence; as their helper in every duty and conflict, without whom they could do nothing, and through whose strength they could do all things; as their comforter, the consolation of

Israel, the man who is the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land; as their example, whose life was to be made manifest in their mortal bodies; and as their master, who had every claim upon them, having bought them with a price, and rescued them from their enemies, and to whom as their rightful owner they had given themselves, body, soul, and spirit.

Observe the nature of the exhortation—He exhorted them all that *with purpose of heart* they would cleave unto the Lord. Religion is a poor business unless the heart be in it. God therefore demands it: My son, give me thine heart. If this be not given, nothing else will be given, unless reluctantly, and therefore unacceptably. But every thing will follow the heart; and where there is first a willing mind, and a concern to please, imperfections in the manner will be overlooked in the motive; and if the deed be hindered, it will be accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. Yet there is much truth in the proverb, Where there is a will there is a way. Nothing often is wanting as to efficiency but resolution; and a fullness of resolution is most likely to arise from a fullness of inclination. Love gives ardour and boldness; love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. While the slothful sees thorns; and the coward cries, There is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets; purpose of heart founded not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord (and in a Christian it is always so founded), clears away difficulties, or is roused by them into greater vigour and strenuousness.

Observe also the extent of the exhortation—He exhorted them *all* that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord—Not only the young, but the old: not only those who were just entering a religious course, but those who had been walking in it: not only the weak and the wavering in the faith, but the strong and established. Who is secure from temptation? Who is entitled to live without caution? None must put off his armour till he has quitted the field. If *any* one thinks the admonition unnecessary with regard to him, *he* is the individual who wants it most. A haughty spirit goes before a fall. Be not high-minded, but fear.

JULY 26.

"*God is glorified in him.*"—John xiii. 31.

To glorify is taken two ways in the Scripture. It sometimes signifies to confer glory on a being destitute of it before—In this sense God glorifies us. At other times it intends acknowledging or displaying the glory of one already possessed of it—and thus God is said to be glorified. And there is no other way in which he can be glorified. As to his essential excellency, it admits of no addition, being infinite: but it allows of manifestation.

And thus the heavens declare the glory of God; and all his works praise him. But he has magnified his word above all his name; and of the work of creation compared with the work of redemption we may say, "even that which was made glorious hath no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth." In every Christian God is glorified, both passively and actively. He even calls his people his glory: "I have placed salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." But the light of the knowledge of his glory is chiefly seen in the face of Jesus Christ. There we behold the brightness of his glory—the express image of his person. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And how has he declared him? Not only by his character, and life, and teaching, and doctrine, but especially in his sufferings and death; and in them not only by the graces which they displayed, but the principles they implied, and the purposes they accomplished.

To these he here refers; and therefore in his last prayer he said, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;" thus intimating the connexion there was between these, and showing that the one resulted from the other—he glorified God by the work he accomplished when he expired on the cross. And truly never was the glory of God so displayed as in this event: and therefore it was typified from the foundation of the world; and therefore the whole Gospel is called the preaching of the cross; and therefore an ordinance is established to show it forth; and therefore the praises of the heavenly state regard the Lamb as worthy, because he was slain; and therefore the angels desire to look into these things, as discovering more of the perfections of deity than is to be seen in nature or providence. The law of God was more magnified and made honourable in the precept and penalty by his obedience and sacrifice, than it would have been by the obedience of all mankind, had they never sinned; and by their sufferings had they all perished. What a display of his wisdom was here! Think of the difficulties to be overcome! The oppositions to be harmonized! The immense interests to be secured! Well does the Apostle speak of the manifold wisdom of God; and of His abounding towards us in all wisdom and prudence. What a display have we here of His holiness and justice! Without shedding of blood there could be no remission. Rather than that sin should go unpunished, he required a surety, and was pleased to bruise him, and put him to grief, and make his soul an offering for sin; thus declaring his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of the ungodly

that believeth in Jesus. What a display have we here of his power, in preparing a body for him, in raising him up from the grave, and giving him glory; and in the renovation and resurrection of all his followers! Paul therefore prays that we may know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church." What a display have we here of his truth and faithfulness, in fulfilling the assurance given in Paradise four thousand years before, and bringing forth the seed of the woman according to the time, the place, the nation, the tribe, the family, the individual, foretold! This is the theme of Zechariah's song; "He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world begun: to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham." But above all, "herein is love." Here "God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Every view of this dispensation shows the exceeding riches of his grace, and justifies the all-encouraging conclusion; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Here I see that love is not only his attribute—but his character—his nature. "God is love."

What wonder the Christian should say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He not only derives relief from it, but delight. He is sometimes carried away in his contemplations, till he is enraptured and inspired with the subject, even in this vale of tears, and in this body of death! What will be his views of it, when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away!

"For ever his dear sacred Name
Shall dwell upon our tongue;
And Jesus and salvation be
The close of every song."

JULY 27.

"*Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*"
Mark x. 21.

We shall not enlarge on the excellency and security of such treasure; but only inquire what is our relation to it, and whether this assurance can be claimed by us. Now there are four classes of persons, under which every individual before God may be comprehended.

There are some who have no treasure either in heaven or earth. They are spiritually and corporeally poor: poor for eternity, and poor for time: in this world they have only a vale of tears; and in another, "lamentation, and mourning, and woe." You cannot suppose, unless you imagine the preacher a barbarian, that he can say this without feeling. But he may feel, and yet be faithful; and how indeed could he express his concern for your welfare if he were to allow you to remain under a delusion the most dangerous? You think perhaps that your hardships and trials will recommend you to God; and you are often heard to say, "It is better to suffer here than hereafter." But you will suffer in both if you reject the counsel of God against yourselves, and adjudge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life. Christianity has indeed a most tender and a peculiar aspect towards the sons and daughters of want and woe—"The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." But you must receive it in order to be benefited by it. Then indeed your privations will be sanctified; the Lord will bless your bread and your water; and your humble dwelling will become one of the palaces of Zion.

There are some who have treasure on earth, but not in heaven. We inquire not how you obtained it. We will presume that the acquisition has left no stain upon your character, or sting in your conscience; and that you remember the Lord your God, that he it is that giveth you power to get wealth. Neither do we wish to depreciate the common bounties of his hand, as if they were not good in themselves, though so often abused. Some purposes they can answer; but it is not true without restriction that "money procureth all things." It cannot purchase health, or bribe off disease. Riches profit not in the day of wrath. They cannot purify the passions, or heal a wounded spirit. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Yea, it renders him more responsible; excites envy and opposition; exposes him to temptations and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I pity the man of the world who has his portion in this life, and no interest in a better. He is daily and hourly leaving behind him all he loves and idolizes, while he has nothing before him to excite hope or desire; what wonder therefore that his death is the effect of reluctance and compulsion! "He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of this world." The rabbini-

cal Jews say that some of the words of Scripture, with which the angels receive the soul at death, and sing it down to hell, are these: "Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness." We have no notion that these benevolent beings derive pleasure from the misery of any one, or that they would insult even a lost spirit. But every one at death will be clothed with shame who has preferred the mammon of unrighteousness to the true riches.

There are some who have treasure in heaven, but not on earth. This is the case with not a few of our Lord's followers: "I will leave in the midst of thee a poor and an afflicted people." Silver and gold they have none. And they need not despair, or murmur, as if all importance, excellency, usefulness, and enjoyment were denied them with wealth. The Apostles themselves could say; "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." Even Jesus the Lord of all had not where to lay his head; and received the ministrations of widows. You have the honour of resembling the Saviour in condition, and the advantage of living more immediately by faith upon his providence, while he gives you day by day your daily bread. He also says to you, as he did to the Church of Ephesus, "I know thy poverty; but thou art rich." Rich in faith and hope: rich in the exceeding great and precious promises: rich in the earnests and foretastes of life eternal. Angels are your attendants; you feed on the hidden manna; he has covered you with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. And as far as they can subserve your welfare, all things are yours: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

But there are some who have treasure in heaven and on earth too. The lines have fallen to them in pleasant places: they have a goodly heritage. The streams of the upper and of the nether springs flow within their borders. Is it nothing that you have not only the necessaries, but the conveniences, comforts, and indulgences of life? Is it nothing that you can largely enjoy the pleasures of benevolence? That you can draw down upon you the blessing of him that is ready to perish? That you can make the widow's heart to sing for joy? That you can aid in diffusing the Scriptures? in sending abroad the Gospel? and in every good work? Fall upon your knees, and thank the Giver of all good for the blessings of the life that now is. And then thank him far more that he has not put you off with these; or suffered you to be satisfied in them—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

JULY 28.

"*For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.*"—Micah v. 4.

This certainly refers to the Messiah, the Lord of glory, the Lord of all. He is always great in himself: and therefore is not aggrandized by accession, but by discovery. He must be known, and he only needs to be known, in order to be great. A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kindred. Upon the same principle it has been said that domestic greatness is unattainable. All feel a decrease of veneration, if not of love, from acquaintance and intimacy. But the more *he* is known, the more will he be admired and adored. The reason is, because he is *perfect*, and *divine*. His excellences therefore are unbounded and infinite, and will admit of endless attention and praise.

This subject deeply concerns his people. They know the importance of the revelation of the Lord Jesus to their perishing fellow-creatures. It is by his knowledge that he is to justify many. They are justified indeed by faith: but how can they believe on him of whom they have not heard? Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Their benevolence therefore leads them to pray that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations. His people also love him supremely; and love delights in the glory of its object. When they consider what he is, and what he has done and suffered, every impulse of their heart cries, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory."

What affects them is not that *they* are so little known or noticed—for what are they? but that *He* is so unknown, and neglected, and despised. He is great indeed already in the views and esteem of some, and they hope the number is increasing; but his admirers have been always few, compared with the multitude, and they are so still. Thousands and millions have never yet heard of him. Down to this hour, even where his religion is professed, the majority in no one county or village has been actuated by the true spirit of Christianity. At the thought of this two things comfort them. First, that it is not so in another world *now*. There he attracts every eye, and employs every tongue. A multitude which no man can number of glorified saints, and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of angels, are continually saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the

Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Secondly, that it will not be so in this world *always*. For it is written, and the Scripture cannot be broken, that "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, his name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto him, and a pure offering." Then the *nations* of them that are saved shall walk in the light of the Lamb—He shall sprinkle *many* nations—Yea, *all* nations shall fall down before him, and all kings shall serve him. O blessed day, when there shall be a godly prince on every throne, a godly judge on every bench, a godly pastor in every pulpit, a godly master in every family—when every author will write, and every merchant trade for Him—when the melody of his praise shall soften the labourer's toil, and the poor of the people shall trust in him. O glorious hour when it shall be said, without a figure, "Behold, the world is gone away after him!"

But who shall live when God doeth this! We often now exclaim, "Why are his chariot wheels so long in coming! Why does the whole creation groan and travail in pain together until now?" How many are there waiting for an event that will loosen the last cord of life, and lead them to exult, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people." Yet the morning is spread upon the mountains. The day has dawned. Numberless agencies are in action, which, by the ordinary blessing of God upon them, must produce mighty results.

But who shall live when God doeth this! It is probable, even if he cut short his work in righteousness, that the clods of the valley will be sweet about many of us. Yet we shall die in faith, fully assured that he who died on the cross shall see his seed, and prolong his days, and that the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. Perhaps we shall be permitted to look down, and see his spreading greatness. If not, we shall be acquainted with the beautifying fact. We shall be where the acclamation will commence which will be re-echoed back from earth: "Hallelujah, for the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

JULY 29.

'*Receive with meekness the ingrafted word.*" James i. 21.

Nothing is spoken of in the Scripture more commonly or with more commendation than meekness. It is often made the subject of promise. We read, "The meek will he guide in judgment: The meek will he teach his way:" "He will beautify the meek with salvation:" "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." It is also frequently enjoined in a way of duty. Indeed it would seem that no part of our Christian calling can be perfectly or properly discharged without it. If we would heal the backslider, we are to do it "in the spirit of meekness." If we would teach gainsayers, "in meekness we are to instruct those that oppose themselves." And if we would receive the ingrafted word, we must receive it "with meekness." This regards the understanding, the heart, and the life.

It requires the acquiescence of the understanding, with regard to the mysteries of the Gospel—This will keep us from proud cavils and reasonings; and cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. After God has spoken we shall not ask, "How can these things be?" All our concern with the Scripture will be to inquire, *Is* this the word of God? and *what* does it really contain? For nothing should then remain but the most implicit assent. We make God a liar if we do not believe what *he* affirms; and *because* he affirms it. Our faith does not honour his testimony if it must be founded on knowledge. If on your reporting any thing, concerning, for instance, a place, a person should say, I will believe it as soon as I have been there and seen for myself; would you not deem this an insult, either to your knowledge or veracity? Yet if we believe the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater. Men may delude us; but it is impossible for God to lie. We must therefore "receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child;" who never sets up himself against the judgment of his father, or questions the truth of his decisions: or, as the Apostle says, we must "become fools that we may be wise." Is this degrading my understanding? It is improving, perfecting it; it adds God's intelligence to my own—"In his light we see light."

It requires also the submission of the heart, as to the provisions of the Gospel. Speaking of the Jews, the Apostle says, "They did not submit themselves to the righteousness which is of God; for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The word seems strange. Should we say, a subject did not *submit* himself to accept of an invitation to the king's table? Was there ever an instance in which, when a rebel taken in arms, and condemned to die, was presented with a pardon, accompanied with a promise of more than restoration to all his

former estate, he refused the mercy? and his sovereign was constrained to send his servants and his son to beseech him to submit! Yet God beseeches sinners by us; and we pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God. And herein appears not only the insensibility of man, but the pride of his yet self-righteous heart. He wishes to be saved in his own way, and to be his own Saviour. He revolts at the thought of being received on the same terms with the chief of sinners; to have nothing to glory in before God; to have no hand meritoriously in the work, and no share of the glory; to declare, when he has done all that is commanded, I am an unprofitable servant; and to cry to the last, God be merciful to me a sinner—He stumbles at this stumbling-stone. Did Naaman receive with meekness the order to wash seven times in Jordan and be clean? Did not the homely simplicity of the remedy fill him with resentment; so that he was turning away in a rage, and would have missed the cure had not his servants prevailed upon him to *submit*—And he washed and was healed. It is no easy thing to induce men to bow to the sovereign and abasing method which God has appointed for our relief: but when we are pressed with a deep sense of the absolute necessity of the plan, and we are enabled to see a little of its infinite excellency, we willingly and gratefully accept of the grace—approve of it—glory in it—and resolve to glory in nothing else.

It no less requires the obedience of the life, as to the authority of the Gospel. For the Gospel not only assails self, but sin: it has not only the relief of a remedy, but the force of a law; and "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed." We naturally affect independence; and our language is, "Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" "With our tongues will we prevail, our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" But this disposition must be subdued. We must deny ourselves, and choose the Lord for our master. We must resign ourselves entirely to his pleasure, asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And without dictation, without murmuring or repining, without choice or preference as to the way in which we are to serve him, we shall implicitly refer ourselves to his will, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

To us is the word of this salvation sent. We have it; we read it; we hear it. Do we thus meekly receive it! Do we honour it with our confidence? Do we bend to its designs? Do we yield to its demands? Do we obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered us? Or do we receive the grace of God in vain?

JULY 30.

"*I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life.*"—Rev. xxi. 6.

And what can this fountain be, but himself? He is not a vessel or a reservoir, which, however capacious, is yet limited, and would soon be drained dry by continual drawing. But he is a fountain always full, always flowing, always fresh. For the streams poured forth from a fountain are very distinguishable from the stagnant contents of a pool: the latter are dead; the former, living water. And what is this water of life which springs from himself, but the blessings of the Gospel, the influences of his Holy Spirit, or, as the Scripture calls it, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Between this and living water there is an obvious and striking analogy. Each is of unspeakable importance: the one is as essential in the moral as the other in the material world. Yea, the one is more necessary to the soul than the other is to the body. There have been instances in which physical life has been maintained for a long time (as in the case of Moses and Elias) without drinking, as well as without eating: but for the spiritual life to exist for a moment without the grace that is in Christ Jesus, is a miracle which never has been, and never will be accomplished. Does water soften? His grace makes the heart soft; and turns the very stone to flesh. Does water purify? "I will sprinkle," says he, "clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." Does water fertilize? The man whose hope the Lord is, is likened to a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." In what a condition would the earth be if the springs were exhausted, and the rivers dried up, or if rain was withholden for a few months only! Nothing can equal the barrenness of a soul devoid of divine grace—But this water of life quickens what was dead before, and produces all the fruits of righteousness. The comparison could be pursued—But the particular allusion in our text remains. How welcome is cold water to a thirsty soul! How comfortable to the Jews, who had been three days and without water to drink, were the gushings from the rock! Moses therefore says, "He brought them honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock"—He speaks in reference to their feelings—It was not oil or honey; but it was as sweet as the one, and as rich as the other, to persons dying with thirst. "I opened my mouth and panted," says David, "for I longed for thy salvation." "As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Such desires as

these, grace is necessary to satisfy: and grace *can* satisfy them. "He that believeth on me shall never thirst." He will never thirst in vain for the blessings he desires; while his thirst after other things, for which he raged before, is quenched, and he learns, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content.

Even the image is encouraging. By employing water to hold forth the blessings of salvation, our Lord intimates that they are plenteous, and open to approach without money and without price. Surely a nobleman would not forbid a poor traveller, in his weary journey, to kneel down and drink of the ample river that meandered through his estate. But Jesus says, I will "give" of the fountain of the water of life—yea, he goes further, and says, I will give "freely." Surely this is enough—Yet it is not too much for the purpose. He knows the disposition there is in man, who, ever since the Fall, is as proud as he is poor; and always thinks of deserving; and would rather buy than beg. He also knows what strong consolation is necessary to relieve the conscience of an awakened sinner, pressed down by a sense of depravity and guilt. He feels that he has nothing to pay or to promise—And he is assured that he needs nothing. "As your penury is such that you have no price to offer, my greatness, my goodness is such that I disdain to require any. You are as welcome as you are unworthy. My blessings are too valuable to be purchased—I give them freely."

Hence too we may observe the only requisite in the receiver. It is not the performance of any hard condition, nor the possession of any meritorious qualification—It is only want and desire; to him that "is athirst" I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely. This *is* indeed specified; but not in a way of desert or recommendation. It is not mentioned as the cause of the relief, but the character of the relieved. And it is wisely specified. Such persons as these are the very persons who are likely to exclude themselves, fearing, as they feel their unworthiness, the blessing cannot be designed for them. He therefore mentions them, so to speak, even by name; and in addressing them, seizes the very thing from which they despond, to minister to their hope. To which we may add, that without this thirst the promise would be no promise; the blessing no blessing—For such only can value it. The full soul loatheth the honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. What is a physician to them that are whole? or a refuge to them that are safe? Water is every thing to the thirsty; but to others the stream runs by uninvitingly and in vain. And how many are there who have no sense of their wants, and no desire after the Saviour!

But the cry of others is, Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people, and visit me with thy salvation. No voice but his can relieve your fears. No joy but his can satisfy your souls. You long for him as the Sanctifier as well as the Redeemer; and you wait for him more than they that watch for the morning. This is a proof of something good, and a pledge of something better. Refuse not to be comforted. Go immediately and drink. And drink largely. There is enough, and to spare. And while you partake, invite others, and bring them to drink of the rivers of his pleasures. And look forward to the hour when you shall ascend to the spring-head itself. There you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on you, or any heat—For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed you, and shall lead you unto fountains of waters—And God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes."

JULY 31.

"*And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.*"—Exod xvii. 14.

This is the first time any mention is made in the Sacred History of writing. It was not known in the earlier ages. It does not appear that the Patriarchs were acquainted with it. And simple and familiar as the art now seems, it is difficult, if not impossible to account for it without a divine origin. Wakefield, a fine scholar, though an erroneous divine and a radical politician, and far from any leaning to enthusiasm, yet after much reflection has contended that it must have been derived at first from a divine communication. However this may be, it was a most wonderful invention. What pleasures and advantages have been derived from it! How has the lover blessed the use of letters! How thankful has friendship been for news from a far country, which has been like cold water to a thirsty soul! By alphabetical characters improvements have been preserved from age to age, and additions been constantly making to the general stock of knowledge. But how much do we owe to it as Christians! What is the "Scripture" but the *writing?* All that relieves our spiritual wants and supports our eternal hope has reached us, and continues to delight us by means of what holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost—

> "Our nation reads his written word,
> That book of life, that sure record:
> The bright inheritance of heaven
> Is by the sweet conveyance given."

It is probable that from this time Moses began to keep a journal of striking and useful occurrences. Great men have frequently done the same for intellectual, and good men for religious purposes. Diaries were formerly

much more common among pious people than they now are. This is to be lamented; for though their frequent publication was unnecessary, and their minuteness often rendered them exceptionable, they served to promote self-attention and acquaintance; and recorded events and circumstances with the impressions they produced at the time, which could not be reviewed without some utility. Whatever may be said of the particular mode, the thing itself is of importance. If we are to be affected with past transactions, and views, and feelings, they must be in some way secured and retained: when buried in forgetfulness they can have no influence to reprove or encourage, to excite gratitude or to increase confidence. And as, like the Jews, we are liable, and alas! prone to forget the works of the Lord and the wonders which he has shown us, we should write them, if not as Moses was enjoined to do, in a book, yet in the fleshly tables of our hearts. "O my people," says God, "remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." And when his disciples seemed ready to despond because they had only one loaf on board, our Lord said to them, "Remember ye not the miracle of the five barley loaves and the two small fishes, and how many baskets full of fragments ye took up?" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

A reason is assigned for the recording and rehearsing of this transaction in a dreadful menace: "For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." So highly did God resent the injury intended against his people. So dear are they to him, and so truly are they one with him, that he who toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. Let those who oppose them tremble—"I will curse him that curseth thee."

The threatening was executed partially by Saul; but fully by David, after whose time we read no more of the Amalekites as a *people*. For some stragglers of course escaped and survived, and were to be met with in various countries. Haman, whose mortified ambition led him to contrive the destruction of the Jews, was one of this detested and exterminated nation.

The Scripture cannot be broken. Whatever improbabilities appear, whatever difficulties stand in the way, whatever delays intervene, God's counsels of old are faithfulness and truth; and heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail. This applies to the destruction of the wicked, as well as to the salvation of the righteous. And it applies not only to nations, but to individuals. Behold a signal instance. "And Joshua adjured them at the time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." And what says History more than four hundred years after, in the reign of Ahab? "In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun."

Lord, increase our faith.

AUGUST 1.

"*For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem.*"—Micah i. 12.

This refers to the invasion of the Assyrian, the rod of God's anger. He had subdued and ravaged Israel, and now entered the kingdom of Judah. The prophet laments the horrors and miseries of the scene; and describes the effects of them upon the places lying in the line of his march. The village of Maroth was one of these. It was very interior, and was situated nigh Jerusalem; for which reason probably the inhabitants themselves thought that they were safer than those who lived on the borders of the country: "For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem." This may serve to remind us—of the disappointments of life—of the source of calamity—and the season of deliverance.

They "waited," waited "carefully for good;" but in vain: "evil came"—Is such a disappointment a strange or an unusual thing? What is there in life that is not uncertain, and does not expose the hope that is resting upon it? Is it substance? Is it health? Is it children? Is it friends?—Does the Scripture only cry, "All is vanity;" and, "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils?" Does not all history, observation, and experience tell us the same? Let therefore the young, let those who are entering into new connexions and conditions, let all be sober in their expectations from every thing earthly. It is the way to escape the *surprise* and the *anguish* of disappointment. And let us make the Lord our *hope*. He will not deceive us: he cannot fail us. If creatures are broken reeds, he is the rock of ages—"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

See also the source of calamity—"Evil came down from the Lord." This at first seems strange: we should have been ready to say, "evil came up from another being." We are assured that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." But "let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempt-

ed of God; for he cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And this is true of moral evil, or the evil of sinning. But Micah speaks of natural evil, or the evil of suffering. And what calamity is there that the Scripture has not ascribed to God? Is it a storm at sea? "He breaketh the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." Is it barrenness of soil? "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." Is it the loss of connexions? "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me." "Is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?"—War is the evil here peculiarly intended. We often connect this more with the follies and passions of men than other evils; but the hand of God is no less really in it. He has "created the waster to destroy." "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together." Let us never view our sufferings, public or private, personal or relative, abstractedly from God. Especially let us beware that instruments do not lead us to overlook his agency. They could have no power at all against us, except it was given them from above. The Chaldeans and the Sabeans spoiled Job: but says he, "the Lord hath taken away."

The question is, how this evil comes from him? Much injury is done by our separating what the Scripture has joined together. Some view God's mercy as separate from his justice; and some his justice as separate from his mercy: the one of these partial views genders presumption, the other despair. These extremes would be avoided by our considering God as at once the righteous governor and the tender father. Every thing in his present administrations is adapted to show the union of his holiness and goodness, and to awaken both our fear and our hope. The evils he sends are the *effects* of sin; yet they are the *fruits* to take away sin. We *deserve* them, and we *need* them; the one shows that we have no *right* to complain, the other that we have no *reason* to complain. What is required of a Christian is a ready and cheerful submission; but this can only be produced by our seeing the reference our affliction has not only to our desert, but to our improvement. The thought of God as a sovereign may repress murmuring; but it is the belief not only that his judgments are right, but that in faithfulness he afflicts, and in love corrects us, that enables us to acquiesce, and say, "Here I am, let him do what seemeth him good."

Mark also the time of deliverance. Though God saves his people, he may permit the destruction to draw very nigh. This was the case here. He could have hindered the calamity at the frontier, but evil came down from the Lord "unto the gate of Jerusalem." So far the overflowing did come; and the insulting foe encamped in the fullers' field ad joining the city; but no further. Here were his proud waves stayed. Here ended his power and triumph. Hezekiah conquered him upon his knees. The Lord put his hook into his nose, and his bridle into his jaws, and drew him back. Yea, the angel of the Lord slew in his camp in one night upwards of one hundred and eighty-four thousand of his troops —Showing us not only that God can deliver, in the greatest straits, but that he frequently does not interpose till the evil has reached its extremity. Thus Peter was not released from prison till a few hours before his appointed execution: and Abraham had bound Isaac, and seized the knife, and stretched out his hand, before the voice cried, Forbear. Whenever therefore he seems indifferent to our welfare, and does not immediately, or even for a length of time interpose in our behalf, let us not accuse him of unfaithfulness and inattention. Let us distinguish between appearance and reality. His kindness, wisdom, and power, are secretly at work for our good. The delay is not abandonment. He is only waiting to be gracious; and the season in which he will appear to our joy will display his glory, and draw forth our praise. In the mean time let our minds be kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God; and let us remember, if things are gloomy and discouraging, that the lower the ebb of the tide, the nearer the flow. It is often darkest just before the break of day. "IN THE MOUNT IT SHALL BE SEEN."

AUGUST 2.

"*I will consider in my dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.*"—Isaiah xviii. 4.

PREACHERS should be very sparing of their animadversions on the translation of the Scriptures in common use; not only because they tend to shake confidence and awaken suspicions in their hearers, but because they are generally needless. It is not illiteracy that commends the present version; the ablest scholars are the most satisfied with it upon the whole. Yet while the original is divine, the rendering is human; and therefore we need not wonder if an occasional alteration is necessary. This is peculiarly the case where the sense is very obscure or even imperceptible without it.

If the words as they now stand in the text remain, his "dwelling-place" is heaven, and the meaning is, that he would *there* consider how to succour and bless his people, for he *careth* for them: but a word must be supplied to show the import—"I will consider in my dwelling-place" how I can prove "like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." But the margin, and

Lowth, and every modern expositor make his "dwelling-place" not the *place* of his consideration, but the *object;* and read, "*I will regard* my dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." Now what his dwelling-place was we can easily determine. It was Zion—"Whose dwelling is in Zion." "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." And Watts has well added—

> "The God of Jacob chose the hill
> Of Zion for his ancient rest;
> And Zion is his dwelling still,
> His Church is with his presence blest."

And his concern for the welfare of the one is far surpassed by his regard for the other. And how is this *regard* exercised? Here are two images.

First, "like a clear heat upon herbs." The margin again says, "Like a clear heat *after rain;*" and I wish, says the excellent translator of Isaiah, who has adopted it, that there was better evidence in support of it. The reason is, that he probably feared, as others in reading it may fear, that "a clear heat upon herbs" would be rather unfavourable, and cause them to droop if not to die. And this would be the case in some instances; but not in all; and it is enough for a metaphor to have one just and strong resemblance. Read the dying words of David; "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Now after rain, "the clear shining," or "a clear heat upon herbs" would produce immediately fresh vigour and shootings. Even in our own climate the effect upon the grass and plants is soon visible; but in the east the influence is much more sudden and surprising, and the beholders can almost see the herbage thrive and flourish. Thus the Lord can quicken his people in his ways, and strengthen in them the things that remain and are ready to die. And when after the softening comes the sunshine, they grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour. Their faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of them towards each other aboundeth. They bear much fruit. Thus we read of "increasing with all the increase of God"—This figure therefore expresses growth and fertility.

But the second holds forth refreshment, seasonable refreshment; "like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." How cooling, useful, welcome, delightful such an appearance is, ask the labourer in the field, in the eastern field, bearing the burden and heat of the day. God, as the God of all comfort, realizes the truth and force of this image in the experience of his tried followers—First, in their spiritual exercises and depressions arising from the assaults of temptation, a sense of their unworthiness and imperfections, and fears concerning their safety and perseverance. And, secondly, in their outward afflictions. These may be many; and if our strength is small, we shall faint in the day of adversity. But when we cry, he answers us, and strengthens us with strength in our souls. He gives us a little reviving in our bondage; and in the multitude of our thoughts within us his comforts delight our souls. He is able and engaged to comfort us in all our tribulation. By the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; by his word; by his ordinances; by the preaching of a minister; by the conversation of a friend; by a letter, a book, a particular occurrence of Providence, a time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord—and a cloud of dew be furnished in the heat of harvest.

Such is the God of love to his people. Are his consolations small with us? O that we were better acquainted with his perfections, his covenant, his promises, and the joy of his salvation!—Let creatures help out our meditations of him. We lose much in not using nature as an handmaid to grace. Let us aid our faith even by our senses. What a state will that be where God will be all in all!

AUGUST 3.

"*I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.*"—Psalm xli. 4.

This is an excellent prayer. The man that utters it *confesses that he is a sinner:* "I have sinned against thee." "If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us;" and the reason is, because his word declares that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Sin is the transgression of the law; and to judge of the one we must understand the other. By the law therefore is the knowledge of sin: and when the commandment comes in its purity and spirituality, and we see that it extends to the heart as well as to the life, to the motive as well as to the action; when we see that desire is adultery, and anger murder; sin revives; forgotten offences are remembered; and a thousand transgressions and aggravations are discovered of which we had no apprehension before. The conviction of our sinfulness may commence with some one gross sin first striking the conscience: but we are soon led on from one iniquity to another. From the more gross we pass to the more refined; and from the streams we ascend to the fountain—till we find the heart, and see that this is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But the greatest sin of which we are convinced is unbelief—"He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me." "He is despised and rejected of men—and of *me! I* have

trampled under foot the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. O let me look upon him whom I have pierced, and mourn for him."—

He also considers *sin as the disease of the soul.* "*Heal my soul;* for I have sinned against thee." Sin affects the soul as disease affects the body. In bodily disease the parts of the system do not properly and freely perform their office; there is always some obstruction or derangement; and therefore the man is said to be *disordered.* It is the same in the sinner; the powers and functions of the soul are injured and interrupted. Does disease deprive the body of beauty, and appetite, and freedom, and strength? So does sin the soul. Does disease tend to the death of the body? Sin issues in the death of the soul. But the death of the one is temporal; while the death of the other is eternal. Who can tell the import of eternal death! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Yet the result is no more dreadful than it is certain—The soul that sinneth it shall die. The end of those things is death.

He also views *God as the only physician* —Therefore to him he applies: "*Lord*—heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." This disease, like the leprosy under the law, is inaccessible to human remedies. We cannot heal our own soul. Creatures cannot heal us. The sooner we have this persuasion the better. All other physicians to whom we may apply, though they may cost us much, will be found physicians of no value. But he comes forward and says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." How! How does he heal the soul meritoriously? By the sufferings and death of his own Son: "by whose stripes we are healed." How does he heal it efficiently! By the influence of his Spirit: "we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." He does not cure like an empiric who only strikes in the disorder, checking the effects and retaining the cause, soothing the pain and undermining the patient—if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. His very dispositions are changed. He is not only restrained from sin, but mortified to it. And how can he who is dead to sin live any longer therein? How does he heal the soul instrumentally! By his word; by preaching; by the ordinances of religion; by the dispensations of his providence. Afflictions, though the effects of sin, are the fruits to take away sin. The sufferings of the Christian are not penal inflictions, but fatherly chastisements—or, to keep to the metaphor, they are medicinal applications, and, like other medicines, we are to judge of them not by the unpalatableness of the taste, but the sanativeness of the operation.

He is also persuaded that *nothing but mercy in God will induce him to undertake the cure:* "I said, Lord, be *merciful unto me:* heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." Here is the only source of our hope. We have no claims upon him, even for his pity. We are not only miserable, but criminal; and as children of disobedience, we *lie entirely at his mercy.* It is for *this* to determine whether we shall die or live. To *this* therefore our recovery must be ascribed, and to this the Scripture always ascribes it—"according to his mercy he saved us." And in this case we read of his abundant mercy; and of his being rich in mercy.

Indeed the mercy he displays in our recovery is not only real, but pre-eminent. In nature and providence his mercies are new every morning. It is mercy that feeds us and clothes us; it is mercy that refreshes us in our sleep, and comforts us in our friends. But the salvation of the soul is the mercy of mercies!

AUGUST 4.

"*I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*"—Psalm xlii. 6.

THERE are two ways of understanding this; each of them instructive and profitable; and both of them perhaps included in the full import of the words—For what, says Bishop Horne, we call the different senses of a Scripture are often but the different parts of the complete sense, which, being unable to take in at one view, we are compelled to survey successively and separately.

It may be considered as an expression of determined remembrance of God, should he ever be found in such places and conditions. Believers can suppose the worst, and yet hope for the best; for they have a resource which can meet even every possible exigency. Hence the prophet could say: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." The Church did the same, in the words to which Luther was so attached: for when the less courageous Melancthon was ready to sink at any unfavourable appearances or reports, "Come," would he say, "Come, brother, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm, and let Rome and hell do their worst:" "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." So David imagined scenes which would have appalled others, and yet could maintain his faith and hope in God—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." "From

the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." "I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and from the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar"—as if he should say, "If I am exiled from my palace, and the sanctuary; if my enemies drive me eastward, or southward, or in any other direction, no distance can exclude me from access to thee: wherever I am I will think of thee, and be encouraged." It is then a resolution to exercise confidence in God, in present difficulties, distresses, and dangers, whatever they may be.

But the language may be considered as an expression of encouragement derived from reflection. He had been in these situations and circumstances; and had experienced in them displays of divine providence and grace. What these were he does not mention; but they would always in review strengthen his trust in God. It is therefore much the same as he resolves in another psalm: "This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old."

This shows the advantage of years. The old Christian has not a better God than the younger one; but he has had better opportunities of knowing him; and they that know his Name will put their trust in him. And we see what is our duty and privilege with regard to God's dealings with us; it is, to observe them and treasure them up in our minds: for they are designed not only for present relief, but for future improvement; that when we meet with new trials our confidence may spring forth afresh at the recollection of former mercies. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

We know a good deal of the geography of the land of Judea. We can find the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites; but what or where was this hill Mizar? The word, as you see in the margin, signifies "the little hill:" and it would have been better so to have translated it. It seems to have been a spot rendered very dear to David, by the occurrence of something very interesting and encouraging there. I have been always led to conjecture that it was the place in which he had been so wonderfully saved from the lion and the bear. He was then a shepherd. Suppose him some clear starry night watching over his flock. While leaning on the edge of the fold, he looks and sees a bear creeping round the base of the hill: suppose him on another evening attending late his fleecy charge: and as soon as he had laid down his harp he heard a lion growling as he issued from a neighbouring wood: and in each instance he had thrown himself upon the foe, and slain him, and rescued the lamb that he had seized! what an impression would this have made upon his imagination; and how could he ever have recurred to it without gratitude and confidence? If there be probability in this conjecture, his language will be much the same as his avowal to Saul when going to engage Goliath.

All places are the same to God, but they are different to us. If we were going over the land of Judea, and imagined that one spot of the ground was intrinsically holier than another, it would be superstitious: but what could be thought of us if we did not peculiarly feel as we stood in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, or on Calvary where he died? What an interest must individuals feel in particular places! How awful to a murderer must be the spot where his brother's blood is still crying unto God from the ground! How affecting to a soldier must be the field of battle where he was exercised with the intensest anxieties that were ever felt! We have read of an Irishman who, when oppressed with a sense of his guilt and danger, entered a wood, and earnestly prayed under a tree, till he obtained a hope of deliverance. Some time after, meeting with a poor creature distressed in the same way, he pressed him to go with him to the spot. It was not the place but the exercise that had procured for him the relief; but the force of the association could be easily accounted for, especially on a rude and ignorant mind. Happy they who not only love to walk in woods, and fields, and by running streams, but can refer to spots made sacred by meditation, and in which they have exclaimed, "This is none other but the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven."

Who has not places to which he can advert, in which God has turned the shadow of death into the morning, broken the snare of temptation, commanded for him deliverance, or afforded him some support and consolation which have enabled him to go on his way rejoicing? O! these "little hills;" they are worth their weight in gold! Let them never be forgotten.

> "Here to these hills my soul will come
> Till my Beloved lead me home."

AUGUST 5.

"*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*"—John xvii. 4.

This *work* was the redemption of the Church. It was no secular purpose that brought him into the world. He came not to act the merchant, the philosopher, the statesman, much less the warrior; but to be the Redeemer of sinners. And "in him we have redemption through his blood."

For to him was the *execution* of this work intrusted—It was "given him to do." Great undertakings require great qualifications and abilities. And here was an enterprise to

which all the angels in heaven, though they excel in strength, would have been found inadequate. But help was laid on One that is mighty. He had every thing that could fit him for the work. It was necessary that he should be human, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." It was necessary that he should be innocent; and "he did no sin;" "he was manifested to take away our sin, and in him was no sin." It was necessary that he should be voluntary, for there is no value in undesigned or constrained mercies; and he made himself of no reputation, he laid down his life of himself, he loved us and gave himself for us. It was necessary that he should be divine, his divinity was required to sustain his humanity, and to add value to his doings and sufferings; and "in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

He therefore fully accomplished this work, and could say—"I have *finished* the work which thou gavest me to do." Yet how was this true? For though his active as well as passive obedience was included in his engagement, and though he lived the man of sorrows for us, yet without shedding of blood there was no remission; and it was by the sacrifice of himself that he made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness: but as yet he had not agonized in the garden, nor died on the cross. We answer; the thing was as good as done—It was near at hand—It was absolutely certain. Purpose and fulfilment are the same with God. Hence the language of prophecy and promise announces things future as present, and even as past. "Unto us," said Isaiah, "a child is born," ages before the incarnation of the Messiah; and earlier still, David represented him as saying, "They pierced my hands and my feet: they parted my garments among them, and cast lots for my vesture." Let us, therefore, distinguish between redemption and salvation. Salvation was not accomplished on earth, but in heaven. We are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; but we are saved by his life. He is exalted at God's own right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour. This work he has not finished, but is still carrying on, and will be carrying on, till all his people are called and glorified. Accordingly it is said, "They shall be saved;" and, "he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation." But redemption was his work on earth: and he said when he expired, "It is finished:" and he 'entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The Apostle infers the inefficacy of the legal sacrifices from their repetition, justly arguing that if they could have put away sin they would have ceased to be offered, and the worshippers once purged would have had no more conscience of sins: but Christ was once offered, to bear the sins of many; and once was sufficient. By the one offering up of himself he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. His resurrection was an undeniable proof of the completeness of his satisfaction; it was, so to speak, a receipt in full, given to our Surety to prove that he had paid our debt, and set us free for ever.

What an indignity is put upon him by any attempt to add to his work! Yet some talk of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." But the Apostle, in these misapplied words, refers to the sufferings of his servants in his cause and for his sake, and not to the sufferings he personally endured, when atoning for our sins he bore our grief, and carried our sorrows. What can be "lacking" here? What can be added to that which is not only perfect, but infinite?

> "The death of Christ shall still remain,
> *Sufficient*, and *alone*."

We want no penance, no purgatory—His blood cleanseth from all sin. We want no mediator, no patron—but our Advocate with the Father, who is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world—We make mention of his righteousness only.

Let his finished work relieve and encourage us under all our imperfections. We complete nothing; in every thing we come far short of the glory of God; and even our duties would condemn us, as well as our sins, if God should deal with us according to our desert. We ought to be humbled for our deficiencies, and we shall deeply bewail them before God if our hearts are right with him. But the foundation of our hope lies not here. We glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. We live through him. We are accepted in the Beloved. We are complete in him. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

AUGUST 6.

"*Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.*"—Psalm cxxxi. 1.

This address was a proof of David's sincerity. His aim was not to be heard of men, but of God, "the Judge of all." He therefore does not speak *of* him, but *to* him. Rash and daring appeals to God are the last refuge of impudent falsehood, and never make an impression in favour of a man's truth on any reflecting mind. But if in your retirement, when you are alone with the Supreme Being, you can look up to Omniscience, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;" if you can kneel before him

and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me:"—this is coming to the light; this yields one of the best evidences of our uprightness.

There are various cases in which such an appeal to God is more than allowable. Let us notice one only It is when we lie under the misconception of friends, the censure of neighbours, and the reproach of enemies, and we have not the opportunity or power of removing them. How pleasing and satisfying is it then to turn from ignorance, prejudice, and cruelty, to the God of our righteousness! Thus Job, when condemned as a hypocrite, whose sins had now found him out, said, "Behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high;" and made no scruple to say, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." There are instances in which we may act with the greatest conscientiousness, and yet be unable to induce another into our views, or make him feel the pressure of those circumstances, the aggregate of which decides our own minds. Herein appears the advantage of reputation; for when a man's character is well established, he ought to have, and he commonly will have credit given him for a doubtful or unexplained occurrence: for though a tree is known by its fruit, where the fruit cannot be seen, it may be judged of by the tree, which *is* known.—David was accused by Saul, and his courtiers, and followers, as a restless and proud young man, who wished to work himself out of privacy into notice and power. But his rejoicing was this, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had had his conversation in the world; and more abundantly to them-ward. For the best witnesses in our favour are those who are most about us, and know us best. Can we appeal to our wives? Can we appeal to our children? To our servants?—Can we appeal to our own hearts?—Can we appeal to God, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things? "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

"Yet did he not rise from a cottage into a palace?" This was not from himself, but from the appointment of Him who putteth down one and setteth up another, and giveth no account of any of his matters. The elevation was not his planning, his seeking, his choice. He gained nothing from it as to enjoyment. He was never so happy as when a shepherd in Bethlehem. It was not till he had left that peaceful retreat, he exclaimed, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." But it was the will of God that made him what he was, leading him, as blind, by a way that he knew not, and in paths that he had not known. The Lord also who raised him qualified him for his station and his work: and no one could have conducted himself, after such an amazing change, with more humility and modesty.

Let his language be remarked and improved by us. Let us learn from it not to soar, unless in spiritual concerns. We may set our affections on things above; and ought to have our conversation even in heaven; but as to temporal things, let us learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content; and abide in the callings in which we have been called of God. "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not." Aspire not to fill places and offices above your capacity. Some render it obvious enough to others that they *do* exercise themselves in great matters, and in things too high for them. And when persons have not sense enough to discern their inadequacy themselves, is it not desirable that some of their friends should have faithfulness enough to tell them; and thus save them from exposure and ridicule? At public meetings, chairmen and speakers commonly begin by avowing their insufficiency and unfitness—But if they believe what they say, why do they engage? Such apologies *in general* (for there are exceptions) go for nothing, or are considered only as anglings for praise, with the bait of humility.

Paul tells every man that is among us not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. There are mysteries and difficulties in religion. Is it not much more consistent with lowliness of mind to keep near what is plain and useful than to roam after things beyond our reach? What have we to do with the fate of idiots and heathens? We know our own danger—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" What have we to do with the decrees of God? But his commands and invitations meet our duties and our wants. Secret things belong unto God; but things that are revealed are for us and for our children. Yet how fond are we of attempting what is incomprehensible or abstruse! Where other parts of Scripture have had one interpreter, the Canticles and the Apocalypse have had twenty. "Where angels tremble, fools break through and gaze." Our Saviour said, even to his apostles, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Yet what a rage has there often been for prophetical discussions! And though no one useful truth has been discovered, or practical advantage gained by all the stirs which have been made in these troubled waters: though all the schemes, which occasioned such a noise for a time, have proved after awhile visionary, and left their founders and advocates ashamed of their confidence; others rise up with equal zeal and equal assurance

in support of new theories. But they also will have their day. The ferment soon subsides. These speculations and conjectures cannot operate as principles, for want of certainty. Yet though they do no good they may do evil, by occupying the attention, and drawing off the mind from the main thing; by injuring the temper; and by producing self-conceit and a contempt of others—for people are never more confident than when they are uncertain; or more eager to make converts than when they need an accession of suffrage, to support their hypothesis and recommend it.

We should be able also to make David's appeal as to the dispensations of Providence. His way is in the sea. The reasons of his conduct are inscrutable. Let us not attempt to correct what cannot be imperfect; or to criticise what we do not understand. Let us be still, and know that he is God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

AUGUST 7.

"*Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.*"—Psalm cxxxi. 2.

WEANED from what? Self-sufficiency, self-will, self-seeking. From creatures and the things of the world—Not indeed as to their use, but as to any dependence upon them for his happiness and portion. The desire of his soul was to the Lord, and the remembrance of his Name; and his language was, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee"—"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"—"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased"—No wonder *he* could say, "My soul is even as a weaned child."

Yet this experience is no easy attainment. The very form of expression—"I have behaved and *quieted* myself" reminds us of some risings which were with difficulty subdued. There is a difference here between Christ and Christians. In him the exercise of grace encountered no adverse principles; but in them it meets with constant opposition. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and when we would do good, evil is present with us—Hence the warfare within. So it is with "the child that is weaned." The task to the mother is trying and troublesome. The infant cries and seems to sob out his heart—He thinks it very hard in her, and knows not what she means by her seeming cruelty; and the mother's fondness renders all her firmness necessary to keep her to the process—and sometimes she also weeps at the importunity of his dear looks, and big tears, and stretched out hands. But it must be done—And therefore, though she pities, she perseveres—and after a while he is soothed and satisfied; forgets the breast; and no longer feels even a hankering after his former pleasure.

But how is the weaning of the child accomplished? By embittering the member to his lips—By the removal of the object in the absence and concealment of the mother—By the substitution of other food—By the influence of time. So it is with us. We love the world, and it deceives us. We depend on creatures, and they fail us and pierce us through with many sorrows. We enter forbidden paths, and follow after our lovers: and our way is hedged up with thorns—and we then say, Return unto thy rest, O my soul—and now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee. And what says the Saviour? He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst: meaning, not only that they shall not hunger and thirst after spiritual blessings in vain; but also that they shall not hunger and thirst after other things, as they once did, before they tasted that the Lord is gracious. The enjoyment of a greater good subdues the relish of a less. What are the indulgences of sin, or the dissipations of the world, to one who is abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house, and is made to drink of the rivers of his pleasure?

This is the blessed state we should seek after. The want of this weanedness is the source of apostasy and backsliding. It was because her heart was left in Sodom that Lot's wife looked back. It was because he loved the present world that Demas forsook the apostles. Owing to the want of this we have so many inconsistencies in professors of religion. They are yet attached to things from which they are restrained; and in the sight of God they are considered as still pursuing them. Give me a Christian that is *weaned* from them, having found something infinitely superior. He who lives most in the enjoyment of his heavenly privileges will be the most secure from the evil of temptation, and walk most worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called.

We should also be concerned to exemplify this disposition with regard to our state and circumstances in life. The secret of happiness is not the enlargement of our means, but the limitation of our desires. Let us consider ourselves as only strangers and pilgrims on earth. Let us say with the Shunamite, "I dwell among my own people." Let us learn in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content. Let us say, "The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us"—leaving all to his

wisdom and goodness—and desiring nothing that he withholds—

> "Pleas'd with all the Lord provides:
> Weaned from all the world besides."

AUGUST 8.

"*There shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek.*"—Isaiah xi. 10.

THESE words lead us to observe three things with regard to the Messiah. First, his coming in the flesh. "There shall be a root of Jesse." Some contend that the expression establishes the divine nature of our Lord, and refer to his own authority when he said, "I am the root and the offspring of David." As a root bears the stem, and not the stem the root, so, say they, our prophet would signify that he is the source of Jesse's being, and not that he derives his being from him. If we do not yield to this reasoning, it is not from a disbelief of our Saviour's divinity, or because we think it of little importance in the Christian scheme; but because we are persuaded every passage of Scripture should have its own proper meaning, and no more stress should be laid upon it than it was designed to bear; for a bad argument always injures a good cause. If we wished to prove what we fully believe, that he had a divine nature, according to which he made Jesse and all other creatures, we would go at once to the testimony of John—"All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made;" or to the decision of Paul—"By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." But "a root of Jesse" means a scion, a shoot springing out of one of his roots; or as it is expressed in the beginning of the chapter, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The phrase marks the family from which he should arise. This was not known for a long time, and was the effect of a gradual discovery of him. First, he was revealed as the seed of the woman or a partaker of human nature, then as of the seed of Abraham, then as of the tribe of Judah, and, lastly, as of the house of David; and this was so familiarly known when he was on earth, that beggars addressed him as the son of David. It also shows his humble estate. The Scripture often sets forth the various degrees of human condition by trees and plants. We find Nebuchadnezzar's greatness represented by a tree, whose height reached to heaven, and whose shadow covered the earth: while his abasement was expressed by the cutting it down to the ground, and leaving only the stump in the ground. Jesus is not described as a fine tall tree, full of boughs and leaves, but as a sucker from an unpromising, and seemingly dead root. He was poor and mean in the estimation of the world; for though he had real and unspeakable worth, though in him were found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, all this is less than nothing and vanity by the side of guineas and ribbons, in the eyes of the multitude. Therefore says our Prophet, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Hence it is not said, "a root of" David who had been a mighty monarch, but of "Jesse" whose name was unrenowned; implying that at the time of his appearing the house of his lineage would be reduced to its original obscurity. And so it was. Joseph, that son of David his reputed father, was a carpenter, and his mother a poor virgin, probably working with her hands when her honours were announced to her by the angel. Thus the King of kings and Lord of lords was born—not in the city of Jerusalem but in a village in the north of Galilee, little among the thousands of Judah—not in a palace, but in a stable. Thus, as he advanced in life, he had not where to lay his head; his hearers were the common people; and the ministers of his kingdom, fishermen from the lake of Galilee. This has always scandalized the pride of reason: but "Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Secondly, his destination—"Which shall stand for an ensign of the people." Here is a new metaphor, for no single image will do him justice; yea, all that we can employ must fall short of his glory. But each figure aids our conception of some particular part of his character and office. Of old it was customary in time of war for the prince or commander to erect an ensign on a mountain or hill, there to summon the inhabitants of the province to place them in military condition, by furnishing them with arms, training them, assigning them their rank and place, and giving them their orders. Thus Jesus was lifted up on the cross that he might draw all men unto him; and thus he is lifted up in the preaching of the Gospel, that he might gather together in one, the children of God that are scattered abroad. Therefore it was said, "to him shall men come;" "to him shall the gathering of the people be"—as the inhabitants of a town gather together at the only well that supplies them—as pupils assemble around the only master that can teach them—as soldiers repair to the oriflamb suspended

over the chief's tent. The allusion is just and suitable. The religious life is a warfare. Christians are good soldiers of Jesus Christ. He is the Captain of their salvation, the Leader and Commander of the people. He conducts them not to carnage and infamy, but to glory, honour, and immortality. His warfare is not carnal, but spiritual; and it is a good warfare; and they need not be afraid to follow his movements; he cannot err. With him they are always safe. He will teach their hands to war and their fingers to fight; he will renew their strength; he will make their way prosperous—Yea, in all these things they are more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Thirdly, his successful influence—"To it shall the Gentiles seek." In his quotation of the words, the Apostle varies the language, and says, "In his Name shall the Gentiles trust." But there is no inconsistency between this seeking and this trusting; the one is the cause, the other the effect; or rather each is alternately both cause and effect too. Because we trust in him we seek him; and when we seek him we find how worthy he is of our trust, for they that know his name will put their trust in him. The trusting is the seeking in the principle; and the seeking is the trusting in the exercise.

But who were to be the subjects attracted? "The Gentiles." Nothing could have been more unlikely when this assurance was given. The whole world was lying in wickedness, and abandoned to the most abominable idolatries, "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." What probability was there that *these* should believe in one who was crucified, and become followers of the meek and holy Jesus? But it had been announced, and it was to a surprising extent accomplished. We may see the change in our own country. We were heathens, led away of dumb idols, and enslaved by comfortless and cruel superstitions. But what a prevalence, and what triumphs, for ages, has the Gospel attained here! And yet without miracles; and by the blessing of God upon means far inferior to those we possess, and upon exertions made under far greater disadvantages than we have to contend with. How groundless is missionary discouragement! What has been done—may be done. Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

And we here see not only the power of God, but we see the nature of the Gospel dispensation. It forbids none, however unfavourable their condition and character. It cries, Peace, Peace, to him that is far off, as well as to them that are nigh. The Gentiles were called dogs by the Jews; and our Saviour himself speaks of them as inhabiting the highways and hedges, and as the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Yet for these there was room. These were to be compelled to come in. The Saviour excludes none but those who exclude themselves; and he even complains of their conduct—"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Let the vilest of the vile, let the chief of sinners seek to him, and try the graciousness and truth of the promise that has been the sheet-anchor of thousands—"HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT."

AUGUST 9.

"*The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage.*"—Psalm xvi. 6.

WE may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of an INDULGED CHILD OF PROVIDENCE.

David seems to refer to the division of the land of promise by Lot. What fell to the share of his tribe had some special advantages, for which he expresses himself with gratitude and joy. He had also been raised up from an obscure and contracted station to the possession of honours and resources, which filled him with wonder and praise, and led him to exclaim, "Lord, what am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" There are many who are similarly favoured, though not in an equal degree. They have independence; or if they have not abundance, they have competency, which Agar deems far preferable. They have an agreeable calling. Business prospers, and exceeds their wants. They have a peaceful dwelling and affectionate connexions. They have health, and power to relish the beauties of nature, the bounties of earth, and the endearments of social life—

> "Not more than others they deserve,
> Yet God has given them more—"

And far more—Their cup runneth over.

Only let them remember that these indulgences are not "the one thing needful;" and that it becomes them to say, with Watts,

> "Without thy graces and thyself,
> I were a wretch undone."

Or, with Cowper,

> "Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor,
> And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

Whatever these outward blessings may do for them, they cannot reach their principal exigences. They profit not in the day of wrath, nor deliver from death, nor evince the friendship of God, nor relieve the burdened conscience, nor heal the wounded spirit, nor content the cravings of an immortal mind. Yea, they should also remember, that they are in peculiar danger from these enjoyments. The peril is, that they trust in uncertain riches, and not in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy—That they make the creature a substitute for the Creator—That they lose the heart of a stranger—That

they forget their resting-place—That their thoughts are drawn off from home by the agreeableness and delights of the way—That their table becomes a snare; and their prosperity destroys them. The writer, some years ago, in a neighbouring city, received in the pulpit the following note: "The prayers of this congregation are earnestly desired for a man who is prospering in his worldly concerns." And if he did this sincerely, and there is no reason to question it, the man showed an acquaintance with the weakness and depravity of human nature. He had studied himself; he had observed others. He had also read his Bible to purpose, which informed him how Joseph, in the court of Pharaoh, swore "by the life of Pharaoh;" how David in his prosperity said, "I shall not be moved;" how Hezekiah, delivered, recovered, honoured, "rendered not according to the benefit done him, for his heart was lifted up;" how Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked—"*then* he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation."

Yet these things are good in themselves; and display the bounty and kindness of God; and yield us a thousand comforts and advantages. And who could imagine they were bestowed upon those who are not worthy of the least of all his mercies; yea, upon rebels who deserve his wrath? Surely it becomes the possessors to be thankful, and to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Surely they must be the vilest of all beings, whose feelings do not often produce the acknowledgment, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

"But all are not thus indulged: all cannot use this language." Yet more *might* use it: and more *would* use it if they were more sensible of their desert, more humble, more disposed to compare conditions not with those above them, but with those below them. For while they are injured in their circumstances, others are ruined. While they have lost one child, others have been bereaved of all their offspring. While they have occasional infirmities and ailments, others are bedridden, made to possess months of vanity, and have none assurance of their life. We do not wonder that persons are dissatisfied with their portion, who send out pride and fancy to explore it; who dwell on the dark side of their condition only, and never look at the bright one; and suffer the impression of a single trial to render them insensible to the claims of a thousand comforts.

And we leave those whom Jude calls "murmurers and complainers;" or, as the word is, blasphemers of their lot. Haman goes home to his wife, and states all his greatness, but adds, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as Mordecai the Jew sitteth at the king's gate." Ahab, in a palace, cannot eat and drink; and turns sick; and takes to his bed; because one of his subjects will not sell him a few yards of garden ground. One is mopish and melancholy because he cannot get a particular place or office. Another is sour or spiteful because all the neighbourhood will not bend to his humour, or think him so great a man as he imagines himself to be—we do not wish the cravings of such groaners to be indulged; it would only carry them the further still from contentment. But we pray that they may exchange "the sorrow of the world which worketh death," for that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life, and needeth not to be repented of."

AUGUST 10.

"*The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.*"—Psalm xvi. 6.

We may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of AN INHABITANT OF THIS FAVOURED COUNTRY.

People are naturally attached to a land in which they were born and brought up, and with which all their earliest recollections and feelings are associated. It has pleasures and charms for them that others know not of. And who would be cruel enough to deprive them of their preference? and make them miserable by comparison? Rather, who would not rejoice that there is no region so absolutely dreary and barren as to have no flowers and attractions scattered over it by the kindness of Providence, to bind them to their native soil, and to make it painful to leave their own country and their father's house?

Yet we need not confound things that differ; and it would be the strangest inconsideration and ingratitude, were we, as Englishmen, to be unaffected with the advantages we enjoy in this highly distinguished and indulged country. We refer not to our extensive dominion, far surpassing the Roman world, having more than sixty millions under our sway, in one part of our dominion only. Neither do we admire the manner in which our dominion has sometimes been acquired and enlarged; though we are persuaded the conquerors will prove blessings to the conquered. In a thousand instances we are far from faultless. But,

"England, with all thy faults I love thee still!"

And how much is there, whatever view I take, to induce the acknowledgment, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage!" Let me think of our insular situation, in consequence of which we are open to commerce; guarded from invasion; and even in war itself know so little of its ravages, never hearing the confused noise of warriors, or seeing garments dipped

in blood. Let me think of the temperature of our atmosphere, in which we are not frozen to statues, or dissolved in heat. Let me think of our freedom from tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, pestilences. Let me think of a country where the seasons regularly return and melt into each other—where are the sweet interchanges of hill and vale, and wood and lawn—where the pastures are clothed with flocks and herds—where the fields and valleys stand thick with corn—where we are fed with the finest of the wheat. Let me think of a country whose merchants are princes, and whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth—a country ennobled by the zeal of patriots, enriched by the blood of martyrs, endeared and sacred by the dust of a pious multitude without number—a country illustrious by every kind of genius, and by every improvement in science and in art—a country in whose well-balanced Constitution are blended the advantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, without their defects—a country whose government is equally averse to tyranny and anarchy; where none are above law and none below it; where liberty has so long fixed her abode; where religious opinions produce no civil disabilities; where all persecution is excluded; and where every man sits under his own vine and vineyard, and none can make him afraid. Let me think of a country where charity and compassion reign not only in numberless personal acts, but in a thousand institutions to meet every kind of distress, and lessen the sum of human woe. Let me think of a country possessing not only so many natural, intellectual, civil, and social advantages, but so many moral and religious privileges; where not only the darkness of paganism, but of superstition is past, and the true light shineth; where the Scriptures are found in our own language, and all are allowed to read them, and able to procure them; where the word of life is preached, and we can hear the joyful sound of the truth as it is in Jesus; where the Gospel of Christ is not only spreading widely among ourselves, but zealous and persevering efforts are making by individuals and communities to convey it to others—Where shall I end? And can I glance at all this, and not say, "It is a good land which the Lord our God hath given us?" Ought I not to be thankful to him who determines the bounds of my habitation, and performeth all things for me? Ought I not to bear with patience and cheerfulness a few difficulties and trials inseparable from a condition so favoured and indulged? Ought I not to be concerned to improve my privileges, and to fear the danger arising from so great a responsibility? Where much is given, will not much be required? Was not Capernaum that was exalted unto heaven thrust down to hell? Did not God say to the Jews, You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore you will I punish! And ought I not to *dwell* in the land, and to do all in my power to promote the righteousness which exalteth a nation! And should not I pray for its safety and peace, and prosperity! "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

AUGUST 11.

"*The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage.*"—Psalm xvi. 6.

We may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of a Christian with regard to his spiritual condition.

Read the preceding verse: "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot." What wonder then that the possessor should exclaim, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." He uses but one word in describing his estate, but it is the most comprehensive. Had he written volumes, and enumerated all the treasures of heaven, and earth, and sea, he would have said less, and to far less purpose, than in saying, "The *Lord* is the portion of mine inheritance." The greater includes the less. If *He* be *mine*, what is the substance of my portion but his fullness? and the measure of my portion but his immensity? and the duration of my portion but his eternity? Yet this is the truth of the case; in the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, he has been pleased to make over himself to his people, with all he is, and all he has. "I will be thy God. I will pardon thy sins. I will sanctify thy nature. I will supply all thy need. I will be light to thy darkness. I will be strength to thy weakness. I will bless thy bread and thy water. All my ways towards thee shall be mercy and truth. All things shall work together for thy good. I will guide thee with my counsel, and afterward receive thee to glory."

This is no more than the meanest Christian may claim and exult in. *Meanest* did we say! We retract the term. A Christian may be afflicted and poor; but he cannot be mean—He is one of the excellent of the earth, of whom the world is not worthy. Let the rich and the great bring together all their claims, and make their boast, the *poorest* Christian beggars them all; for he can say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." And he ought to preserve a sense of this in his mind. He ought to live nobly. He ought to feel contentedly in whatsoever state he is. He ought not to envy others their good things; nor sink like others under losses and trials. When their lamps are put out, they

are in utter darkness; but the Sun of righteousness arises upon him. When their vessels are broken, all their comforts are gone; but he has the fountain of living waters—They have no God; but "the Lord is the portion of his inheritance."

If, from viewing his state essentially, he examines it comparatively, he will have fresh reason to exclaim, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." For what should we value a heritage? We should commend it for *healthfulness*. No heritage would be deemed pleasant and goodly that was injurious to health, without which we can relish nothing. The apprehension of losing this all-important blessing would alone induce us to resign any situation, unless we were compelled to remain in it. But such is the Christian's heritage, that all those who have lived upon it, however disordered before, have been restored to a miracle, and each of them could say, I am a wonder unto many. We should commend it for *fertility*. Hence Moses extols Canaan as a land flowing with milk and honey, and in which there was no scarceness. In like manner he says of Joseph; "Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills." No earthly inheritance can yield the possessor every thing he wants; but God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus can supply all the Christian's need. We should commend it for *safety*. The best heritage would fetch little that had no defence, but was open to invasion and injury. There is nothing that adds so much to the enjoyment of a possession as a sense of security: sitting under our own vine and fig-tree, and none making us afraid. Upon all the Christian's glory there is a defence. His soul dwells at ease: and he is in quiet from the fear of evil. An heritage would not be deemed pleasant or goodly, if cut off from *the privilege of intercourse*. Christians have the communion of saints. There is an open and constant communication between them and heaven. Their fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Blessed are the people that are in such a case: yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord.

AUGUST 12.

"*They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one.*"—Isaiah xix. 20.

Let us consider these words in the noblest exemplification of which they are susceptible; and let us remark what they say of the *saved*, and what they say of the *Saviour*.

What they say of the *saved:* "They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors." The representation includes their *state*—They are oppressed, and their oppressors are worse enemies than any of the conquerors who have enslaved nations. They are more base, and vile, and cruel, and reduce their vassals to far greater wretchedness and ruin. And we cannot mistake who these tyrants are, when we know that "the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil," that he "might deliver us from this present evil world," that he might "turn every one of us away from our iniquities," that he might "save his people from their sins." It includes their *sensibility*. Many are unwilling to own their condition; and resemble the Jews, who, when our Lord spoke of making them free, exclaimed, "We were never in bondage to any man," though they had been captives to every neighbouring power, and were then a Roman province. But these are awakened to consider, and enlightened to see their deplorable estate. This is what divines call conviction of sin; and which commonly operates in the following order. The man first feels the effects of his sin. The prodigal began to be in want: I here perish with hunger: I will arise. Then he feels the guilt of sin, and learns that whatever miseries he has brought upon himself here, they are only the beginnings of sorrow, and a small part of his desert. The soul that sinneth it shall die. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. Who can dwell with everlasting burnings! At last he becomes sensible of the pollution of sin, as the defilement of the soul, and as rendering him unfit for communion with a holy God—"Behold, I am vile: wherefore I abhor myself, repenting in dust and ashes." It includes also their *disposition*—"They cry unto the Lord" for relief and deliverance. Conviction of sin always issues in earnest prayer: and such prayer cannot be in vain—

"He shall send them a Saviour"—And what is said of *him?* A single distinction is given him: but how much does it contain! and how suitable, how necessary is it to meet our wants! Our case is beyond expression difficult; yea, it is desperate in itself, and also with regard to "the help of men and angels joined." Every kind of saviour therefore will not do for us; he must be mighty to save: and our help is laid on one that is mighty—He shall send them a Saviour; "*and a great one.*" He is so in four respects. A great one if we consider the dignity of his person. The grandest titles are not withholden from him in the Scriptures of truth. There he is not only the child born, and the son given, but the mighty God. There he is not only the man and the sufferer, but the maker of all things: "all things were created by him and for him." Can we think too highly of such a Saviour? Can we confide in him too confidently? Can our interests ever fail in such

hands? "I know," says Paul, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

A great one, if we consider the immensity of the number he saves. These have been commonly few, compared with their contemporaries: yet the aggregate of them from the beginning is a countless multitude. But when we look to the future, we read of the nations of them that are saved. It is said, he shall sprinkle many nations. Yea, all nations shall be blessed in him: all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

A great one, if we consider the vastness of the deliverance he achieves. It is called "so great salvation:" inexpressibly, inconceivably great. What are all other salvations compared with this? They free us from some evils, this saves us from all evil. They confer some advantages, this secures every advantage. They are temporal, this is eternal: "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."

A great one, if we consider that his sufficiency reaches beyond every extremity. Hence, says the Apostle, "He is able to save unto the uttermost." His blood cleanses from the greatest guilt. His grace can enlighten the darkest understanding, and soften the hardest heart, and subdue the most rebellious will—Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

But some may be ready to say, You need not enlarge here. We do not question his ability—but his readiness to save. Is he a *willing* Saviour? In answer to this, we observe, First, That the assurance of his ability is an implication of his willingness: for it would be useless, it would be worse than useless, it would tantalize and torment us, were we informed that our perishing condition was within the compass of his power, but not within the reach of his pity. And, Secondly, the sacred writers would think his compassion was taken for granted, and that no one *could* possibly doubt the inclination of his heart. Who, without our solicitation, remembered us in our low estate, and said, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom! Who took upon him flesh and blood, and came into the world to save sinners? Who, when rich, for our sakes became poor? Who died for the ungodly? Who has said, and confirmed it by his oath, by his blood, and by every instance of his conduct, "him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out?"—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

AUGUST 13.

"And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it JEHOVAH-nissi."—Exod. xvii. 15.

It was upon the defeat of Amalek and his people that Moses built this altar for sacrifice and thanksgiving. But what is the import of the name he gave it; JEHOVAH-NISSI? The Lord my banner. A banner is a military flag, standard, or ensign, commonly coloured and figured, carried in war, and displayed to collect, regulate, and encourage the troops. It would be needless and absurd to run a parallel between a banner and God. It is enough to observe, that it is not only applied to him metaphorically, but by a figure of speech, which puts a part for the whole: and intends that he is every thing to his people in the character of warriors.

It therefore reminds us that the Christian life is a warfare. There is no image by which, in the Scriptures, it is more frequently expressed. And though it be called "a good warfare," it is the most serious and trying in which we can ever be engaged; and every partaker of Divine grace can say, with Paul, "So fight I not as one that beateth the air." The persons and things of the present evil world, the armies of aliens in his own heart, and the principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places, constrain him often to exclaim, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." But the Lord is his banner! How full and significant is the language of Revelation. Not only, says David, does he enlighten and save me, but "the Lord is my light and my salvation." Not only, says the Church, does he aid and inspire me, but "the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song." A true Israelite not only says, "Thou hast given *a* banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth;" but my banner is Divine—is Deity itself: JEHOVAH-NISSI! We acknowledge and honour him as such four ways.

First, by voluntarily and inflexibly adhering to him as our Leader and Commander. "The Lord is my banner." I disclaim every other chief. I bring all my resources into his service. I am ready to stand or fall with him—His cause is my cause; and his enemies my enemies. If others *desert*, I will cleave to him with purpose of heart. I will follow him in all changes, and whithersoever he goeth. He shall choose my station, and show me where I shall contend; whether in private or in public life; whether with the evils of prosperity or adversity—I am not at my own disposal—Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

Secondly, by confessing him the Author of every success with which we have been crowned. It is no easy thing when we succeed, to beat off all arrogance and self-glorying. We love to sacrifice to our own wisdom and our own strength. How much has God to do to hide pride from us! The army of Gideon must be reduced from more than thirty thousand to four thousand men; and these

be armed only with lamps and pitchers, "lest Israel vaunt themselves;" and to compel them to exclaim, "*His* right hand and his holy arm have gotten *him* the victory." The most becoming state of mind we can be in is to feel that we are nothing, and that God is all in all. And to this the Christian will be brought, and be ready to lay down all his honours at his feet. "I look back, and see many who have become a prey to their enemies, who once promised fairer than I have ever done. How is it that I have stood in the evil day; and yet stand? Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me. By thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation; and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Thirdly, by our courageously trusting in him to enable us to overcome in every future conflict. Knowing the vast, the infinite consequences depending on the issue of the war, it would be awfully discouraging and depressing to the Christian to fight uncertainly. But he does not, at least he should not, need not. There is a holy kind of confidence and triumph, more than allowed him, which nothing should shake. It is founded not in his own skill and resources, but in the perfections and engagements of his covenant God. "Has he not said, No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper? Has he not said, Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places? My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. In myself I am very unequal to the work; but I am not alone. The Lord is on my side. I am nothing, compared with my foes; but they are nothing, compared with the Lord of hosts. Infinitely greater is he that is for me than all that are against me. He will furnish me with supplies. He will well arm me for the field. He will teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. He will renew my strength, and make my way prosperous. Though a worm, I shall thresh the mountains. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Fourthly, by looking to him for the remuneration of victory at last. The soldier warreth in hope: and it is not wrong for the Christian, like Moses, to have respect unto the recompense of the reward. The reward is indeed of grace; but it is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And while we look for it as the fruit of his mercy, we can claim it on the ground of his truth; for he has said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

AUGUST 14.

"*Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*"—Gen. xv. 1.

Our misery or happiness depends upon the relation in which God stands to us. What an adversary must he be, who is everywhere present, who is Almighty, who has the command of every creature, and the direction of every event! Have we an arm like God, or can we thunder with a voice like his? If he be against us, who can be for us? And if he be for us, who can be against us? Blessed are the people whose hope the *Lord* is; and who can claim *Him* as their helper, their guide, their guard, the strength of their heart, their portion for ever—their shield, and their exceeding great reward—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

"Fear not, Abram." But had Abram expressed any fear? God seeth the state of the mind. He knows the apprehensions which his people feel, and are ashamed to utter; and he provides for their relief; and from the remedy we may always infallibly infer the disease. Abram feared the presence of evil—Therefore says God, "I am thy shield." And he feared the absence of good—and therefore says God, "I am thy exceeding great reward." But what is this to us? Every thing. God is the same in all ages; and they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abram. They also have their fears. But are they exposed? Do they live in the midst of dangers? Are they conscious of inability to defend themselves? They are not defenceless. Their defence is of God—Their defence *is* God. He is interposed between them and all evil—"I *am* thy shield"—a shield too solid for any weapon to penetrate; and so capacious as to leave no valued and endeared interest uncovered. The truth of this fact constitutes their security; but the belief of it creates their confidence: and it should be their concern to realize and apply it by faith; that their souls may dwell at ease, and be in quiet from the fear of evil.

But do they feel not only dangers which require a powerful preserver; but exigences which call for a munificent benefactor? Let these exigences be as numerous and as great as they may, their sufficiency is of God—"I am thy exceeding great reward." The language of the Scripture is peculiarly strong. David does not say, the Lord enlightens and defends me; but, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Isaiah does not say, Thy God, thy glorifier; but Thy God, thy glory. And the Lord does not say here, I will reward thee, but I am thy reward. The meaning, however, is not so much, I will recompense thee for whatever thou doest for me; as I will supply

all thy need only in a way of condescension he calls these bestowments by a word which would seem to intimate as if we deserved or earned them. But we must not suffer his glory to be injured by his goodness. A creature can never merit any thing from his creator. A sinner only deserves punishment. A Christian will acknowledge that he is not worthy of the least of God's mercies—if a reward be *of grace*, it is a free benefaction, whatever service it may be connected with. Hence the vastness of the good—not only thy reward, but thy *great*, thy *exceeding* great reward; surpassing all example, all representation, all conception. We therefore never need be afraid of the participation of others; for there is enough, and to spare. And we may give full scope to our own desires and hopes. Whatever spiritual wisdom, or strength, or comfort we need, we are commanded to ask and receive, that our joy may be full. In temporal things too, we should remember that the silver and the gold are his. We should learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content; assured that if any wish be denied us, it is from wisdom in our generous Friend, and not from a want of love or a deficiency in his resources. Let us honour him, by living on his fullness in the failure of every creature succour. When Paulinus heard of the sacking of Nola by the Goths, and the destruction of all his property, he lifted up his eyes and said, "Thou knowest where my treasure has long been." And what says the Church! "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Let us think of the full possession and enjoyment of our supreme good. There is a medium here between impatience and indifference. When a Christian is in a proper frame of mind, he will be content to live, if the pleasure of God requires it; but he will be ready to go. "What is my condition here, but a vale of tears, a wilderness of briers and thorns, an enemy's country! I cannot pray without distractions. I cannot sing without some jarring notes. When I would do good evil is present with me. How partial always, and how often interrupted, is my communion with God. How remotely do I now feel from that state, in which we shall behold his face in righteousness, and be for ever with the Lord"—

AUGUST 15.

"*If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.*"—Isaiah vii. 9.

THUS closes the address of Isaiah to Ahaz and his people on a very interesting occasion. It was this. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, had confederated together to invade and destroy Judah. They had begun their march, and were spreading desolation and terror: and when Ahaz heard, "his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." The figure is uncommonly expressive, and shows the restlessness and bendings of their minds under the violence of fear. Isaiah was ordered to go and encourage him, not for his own sake, for he was a very wicked prince, but for the sake of the house of David. Two things are observable. First, he was to take along with him his son Shear-jashub. The reason for this does not appear; unless there was a reference to the import of his name, which signified, a remnant shall return. Secondly, the very spot is specified where he should meet Ahaz; "At the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the high-way of the Fullers' Field." Perhaps he was there to order the water-works, so as to secure them from the enemy; or perhaps he was to be there passing by accidentally. If so, we see that occurrences and movements the most minute and contingent with regard to us lie open to God's view, and the greatest consequences hinge upon them.

But what was he to say to him? "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." Yea, the assurance goes on to announce not only that the designs of these adversaries should be defeated, but that they themselves would be speedily destroyed. All this however, is closed with a very significant reflection: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

This betrays an apprehension that the message was not likely to be readily and firmly credited—Such fools, and so slow of heart are we to believe all that the prophets have spoken! It also shows that God does not regard us as merely passive in religion. We are not under his influence like timber under the saw, the chisel, and plane, unconscious and inactive. He does not work upon us, but in us; and he works in us to will and to do. What he does for us, he does also by us. Neither is his operation like the agency of a charm, whose process no one can explain, and during which the patient may as well sleep as wake. If we are taught, we must understand and receive: we are not carried, but led into all truth. If he blesses us, he stirs us

up to value and seek after his favours; and the asking is as necessary as the giving—yea, the one is the medium of the other.

It might seem here as if faith was in our own power. It is not so in every respect; and it is not so in any respect as to nature. But what is impossible to nature is possible to grace. Without Christ we can do nothing; but through his strengthening of us we can do all things. And therefore as his grace is sufficient for us, and attainable by us, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit; and he said to Thomas, Be not faithless, but believing; and he said to his disciples, "Have faith in God;" and he upbraided them for their unbelief.

But the principal thing is the essentiality of faith to religious stability: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." There are three kinds of stability in the Christian life. A stability of judgment—This refers to the truths of religion. A stability of practice—This refers to the duties of religion. And a stability of hope—This refers to the comforts of religion. Each of these faith is able to produce: but faith alone can produce them. Let us reflect upon all this————

And then we shall soon see enough to condemn and bewail in unbelief, not only as it dishonours God, but as it robs the soul, and leaves it stripped, wounded, and half dead; a prey to error, temptation, and grief. Who can imagine the aggregate of the good which it has prevented in our experience, ever since we have known God, or rather, have been known of him? Oh what characters might we have been!—how firm, how free, how happy, how useful, how ennobled! And what has kept us back from all this honour? "An evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH.

AUGUST 16.

"*We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.*"—2 Cor. v. 1.

SOME things in these words are very plain; others may involve a little difficulty. The Apostle obviously intends the body when he speaks of "the earthly house of this tabernacle:" and nothing can be a juster representation of it. Man is not a machine; or a mere mass of organized matter. He has something more than flesh and blood. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. What we see is not the agent, but only the instrument; not the inhabitant, but the dwelling. The body is called "an house" for its accommodation. The soul might have had another residence given it, and a very inferior one. Injured as the structure is by sin, it has enough of excellence yet in it to excite admiration, and induce us to say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Galen, a physician atheistically inclined, after examining the body in the number, the perfection, and the exquisite adaptation of all the parts, was fully convinced of the being of God, and composed a beautiful hymn to his praise. No mechanism will bear a comparison with that of the animal economy. It would be much more reasonable to suppose that a watch made itself, than that the eye, in which there are such marks and proof of design and contrivance, should be the effect of chance. But it is an "earthly" house—earthly in its composition; earthly in its support; earthly in its destination—"Dust thou art," says the sentence, and "unto dust shalt thou return." It is the case not only with the body of the peasant, but of the prince—"*His* breath goeth forth, *he* returneth to *his* dust." And so it must be with the relics of the most endeared connexion. The beauty of Sarah, who had endangered kings, was soon despoiled of its charms, and after a wish, how natural! to keep even the lovely shrine a little longer, Abraham was compelled to say, "Bury my dead out of my sight"—So the bereaved go, and inscribe over the grave of the once sparkling eye, and the once ruby lip, and the once fascinating tongue—

> "How lov'd, how valued once avails thee not,
> To whom related or by whom begot:
> A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
> 'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be"—

It is also the earthly house of this "tabernacle." This reminds us of its weakness, frailty, and danger. A tabernacle, though covered, has no foundation; it has no nails fastened in a sure place; but pins and cords instead; it is a movable, temporary, slender abode, soon taken down, and easily destroyed —The Apostle therefore speaks of its being "dissolved."

But what means "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" Some suppose that it is a description of the resurrection-body. The body, when glorified, may well be thus expressed: but the reference here is to something nearer, something to be found at death, and enjoyed before the revival of the body; as we see in the verses immediately following. It is therefore a representation of the blessed condition into which the soul enters as soon as it leaves "dull mortality behind." The Apostle would intimate that the soul does not die with the body. It does not resemble Job's sons; when the house fell with them, they were crushed in the ruins; but here, while the house is destroyed, the resident escapes. The believer at death is not like an ejected tenant, forced out of his present dwelling without having another provided to receive him. "I go," said Jesus, "to prepare a place for you:" "where I am

there shall also my servants be." This blessed abode is characterized by four articles. The first tells us that it is solid. It is not a tabernacle, but "a building." The second that it is reared by a divine agency. It is a building "of God," and "not made with hands." The third marks its permanence. It is "eternal." The fourth shows its situation. It is "in the heavens." We must arise and depart hence to enjoy it.

But here is a confidence expressed with regard to it: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The confidence is twofold: the confidence of faith and the confidence of hope. The first regards the reality of the thing. The belief of this is necessary. Some deny it; others doubt it: but Christians know it. This knowledge was not possessed by the heathens. None of them ever thought of the restoration of the body: but many suppose that they believed in the immortality of the soul. Yet what was their belief? Did they ever teach the doctrine publicly? Did they ever reason from it as a principle? Did they ever urge it as a motive in their morals? They could not; they were not *convinced* themselves. Seneca dared not decide whether death destroyed the soul or delivered it. And he who, of all their philosophers, spake the best upon the subject, left suspicions at death that his mind was not satisfied. But, as Paley says, among a thousand *conjectures* one of them happened to be right; and with them it was nothing better than conjecture—they had no proof of the thing itself: and if, as he justly adds, nothing more is *known* in religion than is *proved*, "life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel." Now every Christian, however poor and illiterate, admits it as a fact; and though he cannot evince the certainty of his belief, as many did in the first ages, who suffered the loss of all things, yet he acts upon it, and in the whole course of the religious life "walks by faith, and not by sight."

There is also the confidence of hope. This regards not the reality of the state only, but our own claim to the possession of it. The one of these does not necessarily produce the other. How many, alas! are there, who believe there is such a glorious state, who have either no expectation of enjoying it, or an unfounded one that will issue in the most dreadful disappointment. They never, how strange! give themselves a moment's concern about it; though nothing can be of equal importance; and they *know it!* And *know* that if they do not receive a happy immortality they must endure a miserable one; and thus the greatest blessing will prove the greatest curse!

Yet all the partakers of divine grace do not possess this confidence equally. We read of the *full* assurance of hope, which supposes inferior degrees of it. We may also observe that no degree of it, however established, is free from fluctuations. The confidence of appropriation therefore, even in the Lord's own people, is not so extensive as the confidence of belief. Neither is it essential to their safety—Yet how necessary is it to their comfort! How desirable is it, amidst the troubles of life, and the growing infirmities of nature, to know that "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation:" and "give me a token for good."

What a question then arises here—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall dwell in his holy place?" The best way to ascertain your title to the inheritance of the saints in light is, to look after your meetness for it. Your hope of the one without the other is presumption and madness: for can you imagine that God will bring you into a condition which it is impossible for you to fill or enjoy? But if he has prepared you for the blessedness, be assured he has prepared the blessedness for you. It is a holy state—and if you now love holiness, it is a state in which Christ is all in all—and if you are now rejoicing in him as your portion, "He that hath wrought you for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given you the earnest of the Spirit."

AUGUST 17.

"*And Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and, as they followed, they were afraid.*"—Mark x. 32.

They were now, it is said, in the way going up to Jerusalem, where *he* was to suffer and die upon the cross, after enduring every kind of insult and cruelty. But a circumstance is added which is worthy of our attention—"Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and, as they followed, they were afraid." That this is not mentioned without design may be inferred from the brevity of the Evangelists. Had every thing pertaining to the history of our Lord been recorded, the world could not have contained the books that would have been written. But when it is necessary to comprise much in a little, a writer, if wise, will introduce nothing that is insignificant and uninteresting—The incident therefore is mentioned to show how far he was from being unwilling to advance to the post of danger. The action intimates how full of zeal and courage he was; and that in the knowledge of all that lay before him he was eager to engage in the conflict. Many have vapoured away while the enemy was not at hand: and the children of Ephraim, carrying bows and spears, yet turned their

back in the day of battle—Such a difference is there between an imaginary and a real, between a prospective and a present encounter. But this distinction does not apply to him. He who in the beginning said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God, I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart," could also say as the scene approached, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" and after administering the memorials of his death, he arose from the table, and said, "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." Oh! if we were as willing to receive the blessings of his great salvation as he was to procure them for us by anguish and blood, we should all be able immediately to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

At other times he seemed to give his disciples the precedence. When any advantage was to be gained he followed them. It is an honour and a privilege to preach the word first in any place: and this privilege and honour he conferred on his disciples; for he sent them "before his face into every city and place whither he himself should come." But when the call was to suffer and die, he went before them, to stimulate, encourage, and embolden them, by his own example—And who would not follow where he leads the way? How well may we glory in any fellowship with him! How fully may we be assured of the goodness of the cause! How confidently may we reckon upon our succour and success! "Lord," by thy grace "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

But "they were amazed." It is not wonderful that his disciples expressed so much surprise, but so little: for things had never been seen "on this fashion;" and they were every day in the midst of something peculiar, remarkable, and even miraculous. But many of their feelings are not recorded; and what is marvellous and extraordinary, by repetition and continuance, becomes familiar, and ceases to strike. The Jews, after a few weeks or days, gathered the manna from heaven with as little reflection as our rustics reap the corn, and viewed the pillar of fire as thousands do the sun, that is, without any surprise or one thought of the agency of God!—On this occasion, perhaps they were amazed to see him so cheerful and full of ardour, in view of so menacing an expedition—Perhaps, indeed, at the thought how *he* could suffer at all. Nothing had ever occurred like it before. Many had suffered; our earth had always been a vale of tears; but every sufferer before had sinned—whereas *he* did no sin, did nothing amiss, did all things well, and was "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "If *he* suffers, where is Providence? Where is the God of judgment, if *he* is spit upon, and scourged, and crucified? We also trusted that this was he which should have redeemed Israel!" At present their knowledge was very limited and indistinct. They resembled the blind man when half enlightened, who "saw men as trees walking." They were unable as yet to comprehend the spirituality of his empire, the nature of his salvation, and especially the giving his flesh for the life of the world. They were in a kind of dawn, and "the light was neither dark nor clear." Their glimmerings and their doubts kept them in a degree of surprise, conjecture, and confusion, significant of the experience of many with regard to various things which, all through life, keep them in a sort of amazement.

Though *he* was ready, they were not so forward; *they* required drawing on—"And as they followed, they were afraid." The fear we conceive was not only or principally on *his* behalf, but on their own—"If he is apprehended and put to death, how shall we escape? What will become of us?" As yet they were not sufficiently mortified to the world, and willing to deny themselves. They preferred a whole skin to a scar. It was not till the Holy Ghost was given that they were able to rejoice and glory in tribulation. But as their knowledge, and faith, and hope increased, none of these things moved them, neither counted they their lives dear. It was enough that Christ was magnified in their body, whether by life or by death.

Do we not here see how worthy the Scriptures are of our confidence? How honestly they report facts! The writer of this Gospel was himself one of those who appeared to so little advantage on this occasion, compared with their Lord and Master. Yet he makes no scruple to tell us all their fears and faults, regardless of consequences. Truth was his only concern; and his very manner commends it to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

AUGUST 18.

"*Which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.*"—Heb. vi. 19, 20.

In the preceding words the Apostle speaks of the Christian's hope. He likens it to an anchor; and commends it as sure and stedfast. But the anchor to secure the vessel has a place of holding, so has this hope. Yet mark the resemblance and the difference between them; for every image applied to spiritual purposes teaches both by comparison and disparity. The anchor searches after something invisible; it does not rest in the water, but searches the bottom—and this hope regards something beyond our sight. The anchor is cast downward—but this hope ascends

The anchor grasps the ground—but this hope seizes something in heaven. What is it? It is Jesus—"Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus."

He is called, expressly called, "our hope," and "the hope set before us." Every thing, as perishing sinners, we need, is to be found in him, and only in him: for "it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell;" and we are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him;" and he alone can encourage and justify our hope—He is the only ground of it—There would be no more hope for sinners than for devils were it not for *his* incarnation and atonement, who "took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham," and "was in all points made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." But what are we not authorized to hope for when we think of *him*, and thank God for his *unspeakable gift?* "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

But the Apostle here particularly fixes our hope upon him—as being within the veil—and as having entered as our forerunner for us.

In truth, if our hope entered within the veil, and found he had not entered there—it would find nothing in heaven itself to fasten upon, and must shrink back in despair. But it is enough—it is every thing to find *him there*. Then we see that he is in a condition and a capacity to save and bless us; and we resemble Jacob, when he heard that Joseph was alive, and lord of all the land of Egypt. Then we also see that he has accomplished his mediation on earth. He had taken our place; our iniquities were laid on him; and he became answerable for them as our surety. But how could we know the ransom was paid unless he was released? We know he died, but unless he is risen again, and gone unto the Father, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. Therefore, says Peter, God "raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; that our faith and hope might be in God." For then we know that he has accomplished the work that was given him to do; that he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; that he has made peace by the blood of his cross; and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

But there is an additional confirmation of our hope in the character under which he entered heaven. Enoch and Elias ascended to heaven embodied; but they entered for themselves; and it did not follow because they entered that we should enter also. We might have inferred the possibility of our following them, but not the certainty: they entered before us, but were not our forerunners—But Jesus as "our forerunner entered for us." There was a joy set before *him;* and he was received up into glory; and had a name given him above every name: but the Apostle here does not speak of his entering for himself, but for us. Had a forerunner entered for him, it would not have been so wonderful: but as if we were the grand party, the forerunner is for us—and he that forerunner *himself!* Now this shows a connexion between his entering and ours; and a relation of a peculiar kind; and containing nothing less than a pledge. A forerunner was a harbinger, one that preceded the rest, to awaken attention, to arrange things for those behind, and to be in readiness to receive them. In other cases the forerunner was inferior to the company for which he acted. Thus John, the forerunner of the Messiah, acknowledges that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of his shoes. But here the forerunner is infinitely the greatest, and the whole transaction can only be resolved into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, and made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant. Oh! wonder of wonders! The forerunner, the King of kings, and Lord of lords—Was ever such condescension displayed! The company represented and provided for; the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind—Was ever such honour conferred! Yet such honour have all his saints. Because it was expedient for them, he went away; and entering the holy place, he said, "I am come—and all my people are coming—I am come to prepare a place for them—and where I am, there they shall be also."

AUGUST 19.

"*And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.*" Matt. xiv. 10.

John was pronounced by the Judge of all to be greater than they who had been born of women before him; and to be more than a prophet. He wrought indeed no miracle, but he ushered in the Messiah; and baptized him; and proclaimed him to the multitude as the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world; and cheerfully said, He must increase, but I must decrease.

Who can help grieving that this burning and shining light should not have gone out naturally, instead of being suddenly extinguished in full blaze? Yet so it has often been. Many of the Lord's most eminent servants have been removed in the midst of their days and usefulness—Perhaps to tell us that his cause does not depend on any instruments, however necessary as well as desirable they seem to us—but upon himself, who has the residue of the Spirit. John not only died early, but suffered a violent death. It was the

consequence of his fidelity. Herod (the son of Herod the Great) tetrarch of Galilee, a dissolute prince, in his journey to Rome had been entertained at the Court of his brother Philip, tetrarch of Trachonitis. While there he formed a criminal intrigue with his brother's wife. He was now living incestuously with her in defiance of all shame, when John had an interview with him. John acquitted himself with unflinching integrity. He told him that rank did not excuse crime, and that kings are no more above law than their subjects—"It is not lawful for thee to have her." From that hour his doom was determined; and he was only spared for a season, from the tyrant's fear of the people. It is probable however that Herod would not have put him to death, had he been left to himself, for he seems to have had a veneration for John. But when a man has a mistress he is no longer his own; he is a servant, he is a slave—and engaged in a course of iniquity, he proceeds from evil to evil—and finds one sin necessary to another.

Nothing can equal the revenge, the restlessness, and the cunning of an imperious whorish woman. With her, when there is a will a way will soon follow. Herodias seizes an opportunity for her foul purpose on the king's birthday; she introduced her daughter to dance—the dance it is presumed was what they now call waltzing. It excited and charmed Herod, "whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." Not a person present, male or female, interposed a word on his behalf! The barbarous deed was done without even the form of a trial; done privately, and in prison! When God shall make inquisition for blood, and the earth shall no more cover her slain, what scenes of horror will be brought to light! Perhaps John was praying; perhaps sleeping, when the executioner arrived—But he was ready for the event, and the axe would only release him into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Yet the head, the veins bleeding, the hair clotted with gore, the eyes all wan and half opened, was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel; and she brought it to her mother, who, according to Josephus, stuck the tongue full of needles—what tenderness and delicacy—and yet these females had often affected to tremble at the shaking of a leaf! But there is no ground for general reflections here. A virtuous woman need not feel herself dishonoured by wretches who have disowned her sex, and renounced her very nature. We do not think the worse of the elect angels because some of their order, and ere-ated at the same time with them, became devils.

Let us turn from the master to his disciples. Two things they did. "They took up the body, and buried it." Whether his head was returned for interment with his body, or whether the ladies kept it for further entertainment and insult, we know not: but doubtless the disciples obtained it if they could. Respect is due to the remains of God's servants. Stephen's corpse, stoned with such malice and fury, must have been a dreadful spectacle; but devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. It is probable Zechariah and Elizabeth were dead, and none of his other relations were at hand; but his disciples felt a deep interest in him, and performed the last rite—It required courage thus to espouse and honour one the king had first imprisoned and now slain: but perfect love casteth out fear.

Again. "They went and told Jesus." He needed not the information, but they did right to lay the sorrowful case before him: it was their duty; it was their privilege. While John was living, these disciples were jealous and envious of his successor and superior; and were much concerned to keep up a separate interest. But they have now dropped their prejudices and strife; and are willing to go over to him, and become *his* followers. And thus we already see their loss turned into gain. Whatever brings us to him is a blessing.

AUGUST 20.

"*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*"—Psalm i. 1, 2.

Happiness is "our nature's end and aim." All seek it: and David here tells us who finds it. To prevent mistake, and to secure impression, he describes his character negatively and positively.

First, he says, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Here we see not only continuance but progression. Accordingly not only the Scripture, but all observation shows us that the wicked proceed from evil to evil, and wax worse and worse. One sin often pleads for another, and often renders another necessary, either for the purpose of assistance or concealment: while every fresh act of transgression weakens the restraints of fear and shame, and adds to the force of habit.—The sinner's course is here accurately traced. He begins with evil company, and is flattered by their maxims, excited by their entreaties, encouraged by their

commendations, and emboldened by their example—"He walks in the counsel of the ungodly." Evil communications corrupt good manners. Bad principles lead to bad practice; and having tampered with danger, he exposes himself to temptation, and by his heedlessness and position even invites it—"He stands in the way of sinners." At last he feels a comparative rest from those uneasinesses of conscience and doubts of mind that once frequently disturbed him, and can scoff as well as sin, reviling the good, and mocking at things sacred—"Thus he sits in the seat of the scornful." He who has reached this distance may judge of his progress; he may see how far he has gone, and how far he has to go—which indeed is very little; for "the scorner's chair," says old divinity, "is placed very near the door of hell."

"But all this is negative." And in a world like this, and with such a nature as ours, no small part of religion consists in avoiding that which is evil. All the Ten Commandments are prohibitory with the exception of two. "Honour thy father and mother"—this is positive. And "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day"—this is positive—yet a part, even of this command, is interdictory: but all the other mandates tell us what we are not to do: and "God having raised up his own Son, sent him to bless us, by turning away every one of us from our iniquities." But negative religion is not sufficient. "Cease to do evil, and *learn to do well*," is the requisition of that God who not only forbears to punish, but enriches and dignifies; who not only saves from hell, but exalts to heaven. The tree that was ordered to be cut down and cast into the fire brought forth no good fruit: and the servant that was condemned to outer darkness was wicked because unprofitable. A man may not swear, but does he pray? He may not rob the poor, but does he relieve them? We are to be zealous of good works. Therefore,

Secondly, he says—"But his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in his law doth he meditate day and night." If the law here spoken of be what we call the moral law, it is true, that every partaker of Divine grace, with Paul, delights in it. How indeed can it be otherwise? since the essence, the whole of it is to love; to love God supremely, and his neighbours as himself. But it here means the word of God. It is called his law because it is not opinion, counsel, or advice, but the will of God, from which lies no appeal, and the authority of whose decisions the day of judgment will ratify. David could here speak from his own sentiments and feelings. There is nothing in which he seems to have found so much delight as in the Scripture. "I rejoice at thy word," says he, "as one that findeth great spoil." "Thy testimonies are the rejoicing of my heart." "I love them exceedingly." "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Yet David had but a small portion of revelation. How much has been added since! No wonder, therefore, that every believer is distinguished by his attachment to this blessed volume. What renders it so attractive is, that it meets him with discoveries, promises, invitations, suited to all his wants. As lost, he is here informed of a Saviour, and a great one. As guilty and weak, he here finds righteousness and strength. As having nothing, he is here replenished with all the unsearchable riches of Christ. His experience, also, as he advances in the divine life, adds to its preciousness. He has tried it in every condition; it has often relieved his fears, refreshed his weary spirit, revived him in the midst of trouble; and he can say to the praise of its glory, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction."

Hence, in this "law he meditates day and night." It is the peculiar, yet common subject of his thoughts. He not only sets apart frequent seasons for the more express performance of the duty, but his mind naturally, and readily and pleasingly returns to the exercise, whenever it is disengaged. For the thoughts follow the affections. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. If my meditation be sweet it will be frequent; and I shall be able to say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

AUGUST 21.

"*Little children.*"—1 John ii. 12.

This is a mode of address which, if not entirely peculiar to our Apostle, is employed by him with such frequency, that it may be of use to inquire what he would imply or express by the appellation. When you meet with it, therefore, remember that it may intimate four things.

First, his advanced age. He had now "the hoary head:" and it was "a crown of glory," because it was "found in the way of righteousness."

Secondly, the affectionateness of his disposition. He was not only "the beloved," but "the loving" disciple: and seems to have imbibed very largely of the spirit of him on whose bosom he leaned. It would be well if all who are engaged in the sacred office, were distinguished by more of "the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ." Instead of insulting, scolding, and menacing, it would be better for love's sake to entreat, and endeavour to win. Indeed, there is no gaining the

heart any other way. It cannot be forced—but it may be won—and "he that winneth souls is wise." This was the original method—"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

Thirdly, the effect of his usefulness. Many of them were his converts. He had begotten them through the Gospel; and he regarded them as his spiritual progeny: the most important and interesting of all offspring. Such children are indeed a heritage of the Lord—Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them: he shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemy in the gate.

Fourthly, the character they were to display. He would have them resemble the qualities of little children. He would have them receive the kingdom of God like little children, who implicitly confide in their Father's declarations. He would have them, like little children, to depend on their father's care to provide for them: and be free from all anxiety and fear. In malice he would have them children retaining no resentments, and if angry easily pacified. He would have them free from pride and disdain; condescending to men of low estate, not ambitious and worldly minded.

Whatever we may think of these things, we know how they are regarded by the Judge of all. "The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." From this Divine decision it is first obvious—that these attributes are not *natural* to us, but the effect of *conversion;* we *become* such. And secondly—that the change producing them is *indispensably necessary* to our hope; for *except* we be converted, and become as little children, we *shall not enter* the kingdom of heaven—We are without title and without preparation, and as the same authority tells us in another passage, "we *cannot* see the kingdom of God."

The conformity, however, is not to be universal. You are not to "be children in understanding," but "full grown men." You are to be "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Little children are fond of trifles, and will cry and fight for toys—But, says the Apostle, it shall not be so among you—"Little children, keep *yourselves* from idols. Amen."

AUGUST 22.

"*David served his own generation by the will of God.*"—Acts xiii. 36.

Example has a thousand advantages over every other mode of tuition. Hence God—for none teacheth like him—has filled his word, not by documents and dissertations, but facts; and spreading before us the lives and actions of men, commands us not to be slothful, but followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.

We have here a noble testimony concerning David. In his early days he was in obscurity, being the son of a plain yeoman, in the village of Bethlehem, and employed in the humble occupation of a shepherd. But he was soon called to expose himself in the field of battle, and obtained for his countrymen an easy victory, by killing the wonder and terror of the age. After this—for as he rose he suffered—we find him in exile, under the persecutions of Saul, wandering and hiding himself in wildernesses for his safety, and hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. At length, through much tribulation, he entered his kingdom, and was crowned, first over Judah, and then over all Israel. But after distinguishing himself as a warrior, and a ruler, he was compelled by the rebellion of Absalom to leave his palace and his capital, and ascend, weeping and barefooted, the Mount of Olives, where his son, and his Lord the Messiah, ages after, agonized and triumphed. Then we find him re-established in more power and authority than ever, and reigning in safety, peace, and honour—and at last we find him anxious to build a temple for the name of the Lord, amassing an abundance of materials, and sparing no expense; so that he could say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." From this glance at his life, we see that it was very eventful and singularly diversified. But in every period, and in every relation, and in every scene, he displayed principles and dispositions which rendered him not only civilly, but morally and religiously useful. In youth; in manhood; in obscurity; in splendour; in adversity; in prosperity; by his wealth; by his power; by his authority; by his wisdom; by his inspiration as a prophet; by his genius as a poet and a musician; in all his resources he constantly served his generation.

But he also served his *own* generation. Not indeed exclusively; for he has served every generation since. He is now serving the present. Christians now living bless God for his writings. Who has not found in them a treasury of experience? a flame at which he has often lighted his torch? a harp that has often driven away his evil spirit? There are some who not only serve their own age, but levy a tax of admiration and gratitude upon

every future one. Such were the reformers. Such were Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and others. And nothing can be more unjust than to censure these men who did so much, because they did no more; or diminish their fame by reproaching them with a few faults, which were rather the errors of the times than of the men. Such were those patriots who resisted unto blood striving against sin, and procured for us the invaluable blessings of civil and religious freedom. Such were the translators who gave us the original Scriptures in English. Such have been the writers who have defended the truth of the Gospel, and furnished materials for private and domestic devotion. How useful is Watts, even now, by his Psalms and Hymns, in which millions bless God; and by his songs for children, which out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfect praise! No man indeed knows how any good he does may be perpetuated and enlarged.

But if we cannot serve other generations let us serve our own. Some strain too much after distant objects, and overlook what is immediately before them. Some leave large sums when they die—they had better be their own executors, and see and enjoy the application of their own liberality. They had better convince the world that they act from choice; for at death they can retain nothing, but *must* part with all they possess. The endowments bequeathed by many of our good forefathers have operated rather injuriously than otherwise; retaining the support of error in some places of worship, and relaxing the zeal and generosity of congregations in others; for people have an amazing keenness in perceiving when their assistance is not wanting. The cause of the poor and the cause of God will be hereafter committed to others; they are now intrusted to us; let nothing draw us off from present duty.

He also served his own generation *by the will of God.* Nothing comes by chance in our affairs. The Lord determines the bounds of our habitations, appoints us our stations and offices, and assigns us our talents and opportunities. How obviously was it his pleasure that David should be what and where he was. It was all without his design or thought. And therefore when Saul's courtiers reproached him that he was a restless ambitious youth, who, dissatisfied with a private condition, sought to work himself into notice and eminence, he could appeal and say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of its mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." Others too, without any purpose on the part of their friends or their own, have been laid hold of by the hand of Providence, and conducted forward so as to exemplify the promise "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

But it was not only by his providential will that David served his own generation, but also by his revealed will. This he made the rule of his conduct. "Lead me," said he, "in thy truth, and guide me, for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day"—like a servant, to receive and obey the orders of his master. We must not follow our own fancies, or do that which is most agreeable to our feelings; but what God requires of us. For this purpose we must repair to his holy oracles, and ask, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" A woman is not to usurp authority, and to teach in the church. A man is not to assume the office of the magistrate under a notion that he could discharge it better. If a village preacher on the Sabbath leaves his own family without control and without instruction, he may be serving his own generation, but not according to the will of God. God enjoins us to abide in our own callings. If we step aside from them, we may be useful; but the effect is often equivocal, the good is more than counterbalanced by the evil arising from the violation of order, and God asks who hath required this at your hand!

Let this example induce our imitation. We all have it in our power to be useful; and let us see to it, that we decline not doing what we can, because we cannot do what we would. Let us immediately and earnestly call into action whatever influence we possess, to serve our own generation by the will of God. Our generation serves us. None of us liveth to himself. All the endowments conferred upon us look beyond ourselves: and as good stewards, we are to minister the manifold grace of God. It is as much our privilege as our duty. It enthrones us in the esteem of our fellow-creatures, and with such sacrifices God is well pleased. When a Christian comes to die, he must be humble in looking back upon his imperfections: but he will have reason to be thankful, if by the grace of God he hopes that he has not wholly lived in vain. I, said the learned Dr. Donne to his friends when dying, I repent of all my life, but the part of it I have spent in communion with God, and doing good to men

AUGUST 23.

"*And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" —Exod. iii. 5, 6.

THIS address of God to Moses contains an admonition to restrain and regulate him;

and an assurance to establish and encourage him.

The admonition may he understood and improved as a check to vain curiosity. Here was much to excite the notice and surprise of Moses. The bush was burning, but he saw no fire near it, or lightning from heaven to kindle it. He also saw what was more unaccountable still, that though it kept flaming, not a spray or a leaf was consumed. It does not therefore appear wonderful, that he should have been tempted to turn aside to see this great sight. Yet it would seem he was not free from blame. He should have been satisfied with the prodigy, and have waited in adoration the development of the design: but he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and wanted perhaps philosophically and speculatively to explore "*Why* it was not burned." And therefore the voice cries to him, "Draw not *nigh* hither." This curious desire of knowing things that do not concern us, is too natural to all. But we should endeavour to repress it rather than increase it by indulgence. In the common affairs of life, and the concerns of our fellow-creatures, it is an impertinent, troublesome, offensive disposition, and is sure to fix upon a person in time the odious character "of a tattler and a busy body in other men's matters."

But it is yet more to be guarded against in religious affairs. Nothing can be more inconsistent with, and injurious to, that spirit of childlike submission which a Christian is to cherish. We have no time in the concerns of our souls for nice and useless speculation. One thing is needful, and whatever draws us off from this, even if it be something true and good in itself, will be an error and an evil to us. The grand principles of the Gospel are few and plain; and they are always held forth in their practical bearings, and no further. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of this law." Let us therefore be satisfied with the words the Holy Ghost useth, without requiring human definitions of them. Let us improve the parts of the Scripture as they lie before us, without systematizing them. Let us distinguish between the uses and the essences of the subjects the Gospel reports. Let us take the religion of the facts, and leave the philosophy. When the man asked, "Are there few that be saved?" did our Lord rebuke or gratify the inquirer? When even his disciples asked, "Wilt thou at this time again restore the kingdom to Israel?" did he not answer, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power?" In all such cases did he not invariably say, "Draw not *nigh* hither?"

The admonition would also remind us of the humility and awe with which we should approach where God is. And in all our worship we come before him. Outward tokens of respect and reverence vary in different ages and countries. In the East, unshoeing of the feet was the same as uncovering the head with us; and Solomon refers to it when he says, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." The act enjoins the principle which it is intended to express and cherish. Bodily exercise profiteth little; but we are complex beings, and we are to honour God in our bodies as well as in our spirits. Holiness becometh his house for ever. God will be sanctified in all that come nigh him. He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

But what says the assurance? "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God has always bestowed his favours in a way which showed a regard for righteousness: he often therefore did good to some for the sake of others: and thus men were prepared to regard the importance of the Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. When the Assyrians were pressing Jerusalem, "I will deliver it," says God, "for my servant David's sake." When Job's three friends had offended God by their improper speeches, God said to them, "Take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly." How often does he express himself, in addressing the Jews, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because the covenant made with them was for their descendants: therefore, says Moses, "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go to possess their land; but that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." But the better covenant, of which all the spiritual Israel shall glory, was made with One who was before Abraham, whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting: and *they* are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Hence in the New Testament the language is changed, and we are constantly reminded of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Surely even at this early period a future state was not unknown. When God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward; I will be a God to thee;" he must have referred to something beyond the present life; how else was it fulfilled?

Accordingly the Apostle tells us that Abraham "sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Yea, says he, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." And hear how our Saviour argues with the Sadducees: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The relation was even then existing, though their flesh had seen corruption. Our Lord therefore applies it not only to prove an intermediate state, but also the resurrection of the dead: "For he is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him;" now, as to their spirits; and hereafter, as to their bodies: for purpose and accomplishment are the same with him.

Let us apply this to our own case. Have we been bereaved of pious connexions? The relation between them and their God and our God remains the same. Where now are their dear spirits? With himself in glory. Where are their dear bodies? Sleeping in the grave. But his covenant is with their dust: and the inviolable union into which he has entered with them, assures thee—thy brother—thy child—thy mother shall rise again. We shall be, we are still one with him and with each other—

"The saints below and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ their living head,
And of his grace partake."

AUGUST 24.

"*Renew a right spirit within me.*"—Psalm li. 10.

This Psalm will always show the reality and degree of the author's repentance; and will afford sentiments and language peculiarly suited to the sinner in his conversion to God at first; and to the believer, in his return after any departure from him through life.

The words which we have read, speak of "a right spirit." "A right spirit" is such a spirit as God requires, and takes pleasure in; and such a spirit as becomes the condition of those who profess to be his followers. It would be easy to prove that such a spirit must—be a spirit of faith and trust: a spirit of contrition and humility: a spirit of thankfulness: a spirit of love: a spirit of patience and submission: a spirit of zeal: and a spirit of firmness and constancy. Such is the spirit produced in all the subjects of divine grace.

But this right spirit may be injured and reduced. We see this was the case with David in consequence of his fall; and it was in a measure the case with him before; for we read of his "first ways;" and the words intimate that these were in some respects his best. Hezekiah, after his two great deliverances, which he felt so much at the time, "rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." Jeremiah was to cry in the ears of Jerusalem, "Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel *was* holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase." The church of Ephesus had left her "first love," and is called upon to remember from whence she was "fallen," and to do her "first works." Hence we have so many cautions and admonitions against declension in religion. And when we consider how adverse every thing within us and without us is to our better principles, and how the enemy of our souls employs all his devices to injure them, we need not wonder at the frequency of our hindrances and declinings. The defections sometimes appear in gross falls: but let us not think too well of ourselves if we have been preserved from these, or suppose that backsliding consists only in foul and outward misconduct. There is "the backslider in heart," as well as the backslider in life; and while we stand fair with our fellow Christians and our ministers, we may have much to lament before God in the loss of that spirituality, and fervour, and confidence, and delight in ordinances which once distinguished our experience.

We also see that it is necessary when it is impaired to have it renovated. Nothing is right in religion if "the heart" be not "right with God;" and, therefore, says Solomon, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, *for out of it are the issues of life.*" We may go on in the performance of duty, but if "the right spirit" be wanting, the mere action is of little worth. The Lord looketh to the heart. Two donors may give alms; one from a principle of charity, the other from vanity: two attendants may repair to the same sanctuary, the one to seek and serve the Lord, the other, led only by custom or curiosity: but how differently do they appear in the view of God, and how differently are they regarded by him! We act in the same manner towards our fellow-creatures as far as our knowledge extends. In what they do for us, we are af-

fected by our apprehension of the spirit with which they are influenced. If we think the favour conferred be from esteem, or love, or gratitude, we prize it, however small; while, if it appears to originate in selfish design, we cannot value it, however great. But the want of a right spirit affects our comfort as well as our duty. We consider it an unfavourable sign in some professors, that they are so lively and cheerful. We should have much more hope concerning them if they felt fear and distress: we are sure that if they belonged to God, he would reprove them in their defective walk, and improper temper, and hide his face from them till they acknowledged their offence. A Christian may get into a wrong spirit, but how differently does *he* feel! What a loss of peace and satisfaction does he sustain! How is his communion with God interrupted! and his delight in devotion deadened! He becomes also fretful with regard to others: fretfulness is generally the offspring of guilty sensation, arising from some neglect or misdoing. Then, uneasy within, we are pleased at nothing without; and so storm in passion, or ooze in peevishness, like a continued dropping in a rainy day. We are never happy but as we have a right spirit within us.

But we here learn that when it is impaired it is God alone who can renew it. He giveth *more* grace: he is the God of *all* grace. As he begins so he carries on the good work. He strengthens that which he has wrought in us: he perfects that which concerns us.

And therefore, lastly, we must go to him for this purpose, and pray, as David did, "Renew a right spirit within me." A life of dependence must be a life of application. A religion of grace must be a religion of supplication. If I want certain things, and *must* be supplied, and *cannot* derive them from myself, I shall surely repair to him who is able and willing to succour me—especially if the exercise itself exerts an influence every way conducive to the revival and increase of religious principle; and this is the case with prayer; and if he has established it as the medium of his communications, and said, "For all these things will I be inquired of;" and if he has pledged himself that we shall not call upon him in vain. And is not this his own promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find?" "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

AUGUST 25.

"The revelation *of Jesus Christ*."—1 Pet. i. 13.

The display of *him* is every thing. Be it therefore observed that "the revelation" of him is fourfold: and though the last of these manifestations be here intended, all of them may be properly and usefully noticed in their order.

The first revelation of him we call scriptural. This began very early, even in Paradise. There the Sun of Righteousness dawned, and from thence shone more and more unto the perfect day. He was announced as the seed of the woman, and the bruiser of the serpent's head—Then, as the seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed—Then, as the Shiloh of Judah, to whom the gathering of the people should be—Then, as the Son of David, and his Lord. Of him, Moses, in the Law, and the Prophets, did write. He was held forth not only in words but types. He was seen in Moses as a prophet, in Aaron as a priest, in Joshua as a conqueror, in Solomon as the Prince of Peace, in Jonah as dying and rising again. Every bleeding sacrifice expressed him as an offering for sin; the manna from heaven, and the water from the rock, as the bread and water of life; the tabernacle and temple, as the residence of the divinity, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the godhead bodily. This exhibition of him may be likened to a perfect portraiture of a most distinguished and endeared personage, at full length, rolled up on the side of a room, and which the owner gradually opens to the beholders, till the whole figure stands disclosed—So God gradually revealed the Desire of all nations, while his delighted and wondering church exclaimed "He is fairer than the children of men"—"yea, he is altogether lovely."

The second revelation of him is incarnate. "God was manifest in the flesh." "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he should destroy the works of the devil." "We know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him was no sin." Thus he was not only declared, but perceived. He appeared not in vision, but in person. Not tremendously, as in the giving of the Law, when even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake;" but familiarly, "clothed in a body like our own." Not transiently, as when he paid visits to his people of old, but by a continuance of three-and-thirty years—for "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth."

The third revelation of him is spiritual. And we call it spiritual because it is produced by the spirit of God in the spirit of man. It is expressed by sight—Not a carnal sight of him; not a sight of him by the eye of sense, but by the eye of faith, according to the words of our Saviour: "He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life." It is such an acquaintance with him as draws forth our admiration, excites our love, gains our confidence, and secures our obedience. It is what Paul means when he

says, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me"—and which he prayed for an increase of when he said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

The fourth revelation of him is final and glorious. For after all he is now much concealed. There are hundreds of millions of our fellow-creatures who know nothing even of the existence of such a Being. Even where he is professedly known, there are multitudes to whom he has no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire him. Even among those who wear the name of Christians there are many to be found who deny his divinity, renounce his redemption, and ridicule the operations of his Spirit. Thus he is despised and rejected of men. This, to those who know his name, and put their trust in him, is humbling and distressing. But they are relieved and cheered with the thought that it will not be so always. They believe that the number of his admirers is increasing. They are sure that he will be exalted and extolled, and be very high; that he will sprinkle many nations; that all nations shall fall down before him; and the whole earth be filled with his glory. They know also that there is a day approaching, called by way of distinction, "the day of Christ:" "the revelation of Jesus Christ." He will then appear the second time without sin unto salvation. He will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him. We shall see him as he is. He will be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Then his grandeur will be acknowledged. Then his love, power, patience, and truth; his character as a Saviour; his tenderness as a friend; his dominion as Lord of all will be developed: and he will enter, accompanied by a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, a world where he will attract every eye, and engage every tongue: and saints and angels will unite with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

But what is to be expected at the revelation of Jesus Christ? "THE GRACE THAT IS TO BE BROUGHT UNTO YOU."

AUGUST 26.

"THE GRACE THAT IS TO BE BROUGHT UNTO YOU *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*."—1 Peter i. 13.

Two inquiries may here arise.

What does "the grace" here spoken of mean? It comprehends the fullness of the promise, "I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"—His changing their vile bodies, and fashioning them like unto his own glorious body—His absolving and acknowledging them before an assembled world—His commendation; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"—His invitation; "Come ye blessed of my Father"—His placing them in a state of blessedness, which far transcends all our powers of expression and conception. After all our knowledge derived from Scripture and experience, it doth not yet appear what we shall be—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." It is a glory which *shall be* revealed.

But why is it called *grace?* Why is it not said, "*The glory* that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ!" May it not be—first to exclude merit from all share in attaining it? There is only one Being who reigns in heaven by his own right. Jesus deserved his throne, and could claim it on the ground of worthiness. But we are not worthy of the least of all God's mercies. How then could we claim an immensity, an eternity of riches and honour! If we look for a reward, it must be a reward of grace. Our work bears no proportion to the recompense. If our obedience was perfect, it could not be meritorious, because it is due to God: but our services are really full of defects and defilement, and therefore if they were dealt with according to their desert, they would be rejected. To which we may add, that all our good works are performed in the strength of the Lord: we live and walk in the Spirit. Every one therefore that knows himself, will say with the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am: not I, but the grace of God which was with me." And we are sure the top stone of the spiritual temple will be brought forth "with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

And secondly, may it not be so called to show the identity of grace with glory? They are not only so intimately and inseparably connected, but so greatly resemble each other, and are so essentially the same, that the one is interchangeably used for the other in the Scripture. Thus Paul calls glory grace, when he says, "We are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;" meaning advancement from one degree of glory to another; or as it is elsewhere expressed, being "renewed day by day," or going "from strength to strength" in the divine life. And here Peter names glory grace. In fact, grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace in the flower. Grace is glory in the dawn, and glory is grace in the day. But the morning and noon are produced by the same sun: and the bud and flower issue from the same plant.

Let us remember this—That glory is nothing but the completion of what grace begins. It is the perfection of those principles, dispositions, services, and enjoyments, by

which Christians are distinguished even in this world. Have we anything of heaven in us already? It will be a state of sinless purity —Do we delight in holiness now? It will consist in the society of the godly—are they our dearest companions now? Death changes our place, but not our state, not our nature. The change to a Christian, is a change not in quality, but degree. He has the foretastes of the bliss; the first-fruits of the harvest; the earnest of the inheritance—"He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given to us the earnest of the Spirit."

What then is our duty in the prospect of the event? For the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, "GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND, BE SOBER, AND HOPE TO THE END."

AUGUST 27.

"GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND, BE SOBER, AND HOPE TO THE END *for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"—1 Peter i. 13.

OUR duty with regard to this event is expressed three ways. First, confirmation of principles—"Gird up the loins of your mind." The loins are the seat of physical strength. It is said of Behemoth, "his strength is in his loins." If the loins of a man yield, his body soon fails. When therefore he is weary, nature instinctively teaches him to put his hands on his loins, as if to support them. And hence the bandage or girdle worn about the loins by those who would prepare for strenuous exertion of any kind. In reference to which says another Apostle, "Let your loins be girt about with truth." It is not necessary that a man should make up his mind firmly upon every inferior opinion; but if he be loose in his leading principles in religion, he will never excel. There may be a foundation without a superstructure; but there can be no solid and safe superstructure without a foundation. Wherein does the profiting of those appear who think it is a matter of little importance what a man believes? And how do we read the Scriptures? "Buy the truth and sell it not." "Exhorting them to continue in the faith." "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart *be established with grace.*"

Secondly, temperance of attachment—"Be sober." Some would think to enforce such an article as this was not preaching the Gospel—and it may not be preaching *their* gospel: but when Paul spake "concerning the faith in Christ," he "reasoned concerning righteousness, *temperance*, and judgment to come." Others think this order only regards excess in eating and drinking. Sobriety intends nothing less than this, but it comprehends much more, at least in the Scripture. One would suppose that common decency, and a regard for life and health, would restrain a man from gluttony and drunkenness. But a Christian is to moderate all his appetites and passions. He is not to be indulgent in sleep; nor suffer this downy foe to rob him of so much of his time. He should consider sleep an infirmity rather than a privilege. It is humbling to think of dying half our time to be alive the rest—Angels are nobly free from this mortifying necessity. We should be sober in all our affections and pursuits as to earthly things. Our Lord speaks of our hearts being overcharged, not only with surfeiting and drunkenness, but the cares of this life—These may morally intoxicate. And as wine oppresses the senses, disturbs reason, and hinders us from any thing useful; so worldly anxieties besot the mind, and unfit us for every good word and work. Paul exhorts "young men to be sober-minded." And we see how well they are exemplifying this —How suspicious they are of their own judgments—How disposed they are to consult the aged and the experienced—And how backward they are to decide or speak upon every difficult subject! He also admonishes women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety." And how well it is to see this also so fully verified "in women professing godliness."

Thirdly, constancy of expectation—"And hope to the end." There is nothing more desirable or necessary than this. We not only rejoice in hope; but "we are saved by hope." It keeps our hearts and minds from the allurements and seductions of the world: and it sustains us in trouble; being, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. Where is the Christian but has often said—

> "Amidst temptations sharp and long,
> My soul to this dear refuge flies:
> Hope is my anchor firm and strong,
> While tempests blow and billows rise."

Yet it is no easy thing to maintain the full exercise of hope; especially under those trying dispensations, which seem as if the Lord was angry with us to destroy: and also under a sense of our unworthiness, arising from our unprofitableness and deficiencies. These ought to humble us; but we must not cast away our confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. There is enough to bear up our hope in every change of condition, and under every moral infirmity, in the promises of the Gospel, and the fullness of the Redeemer. And the time of trial is limited. Though we are to hope to the end, the end is not far off; "for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Then the burden will be removed from the shoulder. Then the warfare will be accomplished. Then we shall be with him, where he is to behold

his glory, and be filled with all the fullness of God. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

AUGUST 28.

"*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*"—Psalm i. 3.

THE heir of this promise is described in the preceding verses: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." "*He*" is the person whose condition and prospects are here displayed by images the most pleasing and instructive.

"*He* shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water"—Here we see how he came to be found in a situation so favoured. He was not there naturally, but "planted" there. And this was done by a Divine hand: "for they shall be called trees of righteousness, *the planting of the Lord*, that he might be glorified."

But see the advantage of the situation itself—He is planted "by rivers of waters." It means an affluence of resources necessary to growth. The deficiencies of Christians cannot be charged on Christianity. They are not straitened in their condition, but only in themselves. These rivers of waters mean two things. First, the means of grace. Though these would not be efficient of themselves, there is a subjective suitableness and tendency in them to do us good; and they are appointed for this very purpose; and we may look for the Divine blessing in the use of them. They who undervalue prayer, reading the Scriptures, private meditation, Christian intercourse, the preaching of the word, and the table of the Lord, show little concern for soul-prosperity: but they who are diligent in the proper use of them will be fat and flourishing, and not only have life but have it more abundantly. Secondly, the Spirit of Grace. Divine ordinances are good, but Divine influences are better. Every Christian has what the Apostle calls "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." And so ample and rich as well as necessary is this supply, that we are said to "live in the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit," and to be "filled with the Spirit."

Of such a privileged individual three things are here spoken. First: "He bringeth forth his fruit in his season." From a tree planted in dry and scorching sand it would be unreasonable to look for produce; but not if planted by rivers of waters. As God provides for the fertility of his people, he expects it, and he is not disappointed. They have all the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. He finds it indeed in various degrees; for all the trees are not of the same size and age; but there is not one barren among them. A tree has his time for bearing; and it is enough if he bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his natural, proper, and appointed season. So it is with a Christian. He is required indeed to be always abounding in the work of the Lord; but this does not hinder the special claims of particular periods. As we have opportunity we are to do good. We are to be humble when we are applauded; to be liberal when riches increase upon us; to possess our souls in patience in adversity: and under bereavements to say, The will of the Lord be done.

Secondly, "His leaf also shall not wither." The leaf is a part of the composition of a tree in its perfect state. It is produced and nourished by the same sap that feeds the fruit. It even aids the fruit by moisture and by shade, and adds to the beauty of the tree, which, without it, would appear naked, cheerless, and uninviting. We read of trees whose leaves are for healing. The leaves of others afford a covering from the heat, so that persons may sit under their shadow as well as partake of their fruit. Here we approve of the application of "the sweet Psalmist" of our Israel

> "Green as a leaf, and ever fair,
> Shall his *profession* shine;
> While fruits of holiness appear
> Like clusters on the vine."

In trees bearing fruit, leaves are not sufficient without it; but as accompaniments and additions they are valuable. A form of godliness is nothing without the power, but the power cannot properly dispense with the form. When profession results from principle it is not ornamental to religion, but useful to ourselves and others. And when the Christian appears what he really is, when he not only gives himself to the Lord, but to his people, by the will of God, when he not only believes with the heart, but confesses with the mouth, and holds fast not only the reality but the profession of his faith without wavering, he is the tree whose "*leaf also* shall not wither." We have evergreens; but none of our fruit-bearing trees are such. All these with us at the approach of winter drop their verdure, and remind us of our decay and mortality; "We all do fade as a leaf." But in warmer climes there are trees which retain their foliage by constant and fresh vigour all the year. And there are Christians that exemplify this. The profession of many is undurable: it has no

root in themselves: it is not sustained by any internal and vital succour: it is influenced only by outward excitements which often fail; and thus even all their pretensions are given up. But God puts his Spirit within his people, and thus causes them to walk in his statutes. The water he gives them is in them, and springs up into everlasting life. One of the finest sights in the world is a Christian at the end of a long course with an unsullied reputation, not only sincere, but without offence, and still alive to the things of God—His hair may be white, but his leaf is green—and the hoary head is a crown of glory being found in the way of righteousness.

Thirdly; "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Here the metaphor ends. Exertion cannot be ascribed to a tree. Some indeed would carry on the figure, alleging that the word "doeth" admits of being rendered "beareth;" and so they would read, "And whatsoever he beareth shall prosper," that is, it shall not be blasted or blighted, but shall reach maturity. But this had been previously insured. Our translators saw no propriety in this change. They knew that God's word is not bound by the rules of human criticism; and that metaphors should not be carried too far. It is wise to know when to drop them. The assurance addresses itself to a common feeling in our nature—It is hope of success that induces men to labour. Who, if he knew it, would exert himself in vain? To a Jew such an address would be peculiarly suited; as on his obedience, prosperity was invariably to attend. With regard to the Christian, the promise cannot be taken without some distinction. In his temporal enterprises, he is not authorized to look for success in all he does. His plans and wishes may often fail; but his welfare requires this; and all things work together for good to them that love God: while success is sure to attend him in his spiritual affairs. There he cannot labour in vain. He prays, and he shall prosper in it: "for he that seeketh findeth." He fights, and he shall prosper in it; for "his enemies shall be found liars unto him, and he shall tread upon their high places." He sows, and he shall prosper; for "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy"—AND WHATSOEVER HE DOETH SHALL PROSPER.

AUGUST 29.

"*For thou hast a little strength.*"—Rev. iii. 8.

THIS is the language of Christ to the Church of Philadelphia. It is obviously spoken in a way of commendation and encouragement. Though they were distinguished by no great attainments, there was something in them really good and spiritual; and therefore he would not deprive them of the privileges they enjoyed, but would even enlarge them: "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it—for thou *hast a little strength*, and hast kept my word, and not denied my name." It is thus he comes down like rain on the mown grass. It is thus he verifies the prediction, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

It would be an abuse of this passage were we, in consequence of it, to become remiss in duty, and, as the Scripture says, "to settle upon our lees." It shows a low aim, and is even an unfavourable proof of a man's sincerity, when he only seeks to be satisfied of the existence of his religion and of his eternal safety. We ought to be anxious, not only to have life, but to have it more abundantly. We should be concerned for the honour of God, and our usefulness to men. By the weakness of our grace we lose much in a way of evidence and comfort. We are commanded to "grow in grace;" and are assured that God "giveth more grace." Indeed the principle naturally urges the progress, and they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious will desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.

But the declaration does afford "strong consolation." And such consolation the Apostle tells us is necessary, not only to them that are fleeing, but "to them that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them." It is no easy thing when persons are pressed down by a sense of their vileness and imperfections, to keep them from fearing that they have no part nor lot in the matter, and that their hearts are not right in the sight of God. They are prone to judge of the truth of their grace by the degree of it; and lose the comfort derivable from what they have, in thinking of what they have not. Comparing themselves with saints of great eminence, and dwindling into nothing before *them*, they forget that in the household of faith there are various ages and statures; and that those who are not "full-grown men" may be "little children." The fold of the heavenly Shepherd contains not only sheep but lambs, and he gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom.

The weakness of our grace should therefore humble us, but not drive us to despair: and while we lament that we have not more, we should be thankful that we have any. Though the mixture is lamentable, the Lord will not reject the ore for the dross adhering to it; and will in due time separate the one from the other. As soon as it is sown, we say, This is a field of wheat. The blade is not the full corn in the ear, but it will become so—"Four months and then cometh harvest." If it be but the dawn with us at present, the dawn, though less than the day, is better than the night, and proves that the sun is rising,

and at hand; and what shall stop his course, or turn him aside? And "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

What a lovely Being have we before us! He is fairer than the children of men! Let us give him all the confidence of our hearts. Let us admire, and praise, and recommend him.

And let us be concerned to imitate him. Hence it is said, "Be ye followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us." Is he forgiving, and meek, and condescending, and tender, and compassionate? As the professors of his Name, let the same mind also be in us: and let us remember, that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If we resemble him, we shall not despise the day of small things. In our social state as a church we shall not exact perfection, and if we have not all the satisfaction we could desire, we shall lean to the side of candour, and receive one another as Christ receives us. If we are strong we shall bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves. We shall give up things in which we could conscientiously indulge ourselves, lest we offend the consciences of our weaker brethren. We shall not press young beginners with high and difficult doctrines, but patiently wait till experience prepares for the admission of them. He taught his disciples as they were able to bear it. Milk is for babes: who could think of giving them not only strong meat, but the bones of controversy, which, if they happen to have a little flesh upon them, or marrow in them, are beyond *their* use. If a brother also be overtaken in a fault, let us restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted, and thinking of him who took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses. Let us always have a word in season for the weary. Let us comfort the feeble-minded. Let us make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Blessed Jesus! Beholding as in a glass thy glory, may we be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

AUGUST 30.

"*He shall sit and rule upon his throne.*"
Zech. vi. 13.

A THRONE is literally the seat of a king, and therefore the emblem of royalty. Solomon's throne was made of ivory and gold; it was six steps high; and had the same number of lions on each side of it; so "that there was none like it in any kingdom." But a greater than Solomon is here. And a greater than angels—"Of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire: but unto the Son he saith, Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." In the year that Uzziah died, says the Prophet, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple"—And the Evangelist makes no scruple to add, "These things said Isaiah when he saw *his* glory and spake of *him*."

Yet however sublime and unrivalled, it is *his* throne. He has dearly earned it; and he sees in it the travail of his soul—Because his soul was made an offering for sin, he sees his seed, and prolongs his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand—Because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name. But it is *his*, not only by Divine ordination, but by the suffrage of his people. They are all made willing in the day of his power. They all acknowledge with shame and sorrow, "O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us:" but they can all avow, "Henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name"—

> "Jesus is worthy to receive
> Honour and power divine;
> And blessings more than we can give
> Be, Lord, for ever thine."

Faith is our amen to God's testimony, especially as it concerns the record that he hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. It brings us into *his* views and designs: and by enabling us to adopt them it makes them our own acts and deeds—And hence *we* are considered as doing what *he himself* does: "The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint them one head, and they shall come up out of the land."

Many, if they ascend a throne, can hardly be said to sit and rule there. They are soon hurled from it by violence, or drop from it by weakness. And if they continue awhile in it, they have little pleasure or repose: they are filled with cares and fears, and cannot do the things that they would. The sovereign of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces labours hard till the going down of the sun to save his prime minister, but in spite of him Daniel is thrown into the lions' den. What a wretch is Ahab, who, though king of Israel, is sick, and can neither eat or drink, because he cannot get a few feet of garden ground from a faithful subject whose principle he ought to have admired—But Jesus "shall *sit* and *rule* upon his throne." This intimates successful government, established dominion, continued possession, full enjoyment. The King of Zion will

never be deposed; will never die. Nothing can impede him; nothing shall perplex him; nothing shall induce him to change his proceedings—His enemies shall be made his footstool. He has enemies; but he rules in the midst of his enemies. It comports with his plan to suffer them to continue and to oppose him for a time; but he has them in derision, and can more easily destroy them than a giant can dash in pieces with a rod of iron a potter's vessel. He will display his wisdom and power in correcting their designs; he will make all their efforts to subserve his own purposes—The wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath will he restrain.

For though his spiritual empire at present be limited, yet let two things be remembered—First, his real dominion is universal. He is not only the King of saints, but the King of kings, and the King of nations. All creatures are his servants, from a worm to an archangel. Not only are the treasures of grace his, but the elements of nature, and all the dispensations of Providence. He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. He is head over all things to the Church. And this was necessary; for unless all things were put under him, how could he make them all work together for the good of his people. Yet this is the case; and it will be a noble part of our future employment and pleasure to trace the correspondences, and to acknowledge that all his ways have been mercy and truth.

Secondly, though at present his spiritual kingdom be limited, and the subjects who obey him from the heart be comparatively few, it will not be so always, nor will it be so long. He shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. "Yea all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him."

Let the prospect and the assurance enliven our exertions and encourage our hope—"Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

AUGUST 31.

"*And he shall be a priest upon his throne.*"
Zech. vi. 13.

In the Jewish economy, kings were not priests, nor priests kings. The offices were always separated. God divided them between two tribes and two families: the diadem was given to Juda, and the censor to Levi; the one belonged to the house of David, the other to the house of Aaron. And so evil and dangerous was it to unite them, that when Jehoash dared to burn incense his hand withered, and he was taken out of the temple a spectacle of Divine displeasure. But Jesus is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows: he combines these functions and dignities; and is "*a Priest* upon *his throne.*"

Something of this kind had indeed occurred before the Law, in the case of Melchisedec. He was priest of the Most High God; and he was also king of righteousness, and king of Salem, which is, king of peace. Hence the Apostle considers this wonderful character as a greater type of the Messiah than any of the Aaronical order—because he was not only to officiate as a priest, but to rule as a king.

Now let us look after the fact; and we shall see that he never appeared in one of these offices without exemplifying the other. Do we view him when he was more peculiarly the priest? That is, in the days of his flesh, when his whole life seemed a sacrifice, and he died upon the cross? But do we here see the priest only? Does not the king also appear? Did not the wise men from the East come to worship him as born King of the Jews? Did not the winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils, yield him subjection? And when he poured out his soul unto death, did not the sun, and the earth, and the rocks, and the graves adore him? Did he not by a look turn the heart of Peter? Did he not promise the dying thief a place in Paradise with himself? And did he not rise the Lord both of the dead and living? Or do we view him when he seems more peculiarly the king? That is, after he was received up into heaven, and was crowned with glory and honour, and had a name given him above every name? But do we here see the king only? Does not the priest also appear? Did not John see him "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle?" Did he not see Jesus "in the midst of the throne as a lamb that had been slain?" Did he not hear the songs of the blessed, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood?" Do not his ministers preach him as crucified? Does not his own supper show forth his death? Yea, says the Apostle, if he were on earth he would not be a priest. There he performed the sacrificial part of the office: but he performed the intercessory and benedictory above, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us, and commands the blessing even life for evermore—Thus he is a Priest upon his throne.

Whence, O my soul! see the nature of our condition since the fall. How necessitous is it; and how various as well as numerous are our wants! We are ignorant and need enlightening; enslaved and need redemption; guilty and need pardon; unholy and need renovation; lost and need all the salvation of the cross and the throne.

—And what a multiplicity of excellences and influences do I behold in the Lord Jesus! "Thou art fairer than the children of men."

SEPTEMBER 1.

"*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.*"—Luke iv. 16.

To a man of reflection, feeling, and piety, it will be always interesting and impressive to come to the place where he had been brought up. How many events will revive, and rush over his mind! It will be well if he be not afflicted with instances of early depravity, and be made to possess the iniquities of his youth. He must be grateful—"Here I was sustained in infancy, and preserved in childhood." Here "the length of my days" made the outgoings of my mornings and evenings to rejoice. The scenery remains the same, the river, the hills, and the vale, the wood and the lawn—but how changed am I in my connexions, prospects, opinions, and feelings—and how many who once knew me, know me no more for ever!

No being ever returned to such a place, and with such sentiments as he who was fairer than the children of men.

What was Nazareth? A small country town among the Zebulonites in Galilee, seventy-two miles north of Jerusalem, and west of mount Tabor. It was so reputeless for achievement and excellency, that when Philip said to Nathanael, We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph; Nathanael incredulously exclaimed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

But how came he to be brought up in this place? Here indeed he had been conceived of the Holy Ghost: for Mary lived at Nazareth when the angel Gabriel came unto her and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Yet he was born in Bethlehem Judah, according to the prophecy of Micah. "But the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

And how was he here brought up? The Scripture is little adapted to gratify our curiosity. A veil is thrown over the private life of Jesus, which it is impossible to draw aside. Nothing can be more idle and absurd than the Popish legends concerning his infant manners and miracles. "And when he was twelve years old he was found in the temple, in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions; and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers"—"And he said unto Joseph and Mary, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"—This is all the Holy Ghost has seen fit to communicate concerning the thirty first years of his life. He had no public education; and therefore it was asked by those who could not be ignorant of the fact, "How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?" And as Joseph and Mary were poor, it is not likely that he lived in indolence: nothing is so inconsistent with a Christian life, as doing nothing and having nothing to do. His reputed father was a carpenter, and once the name is applied to himself. We are sometimes amazed, considering the brevity of his life, that he should not have entered on his ministry till his thirtieth year. But it was the same with his forerunner John, whose life was yet shorter. God's thoughts are not our thoughts: and we are unable to assign, without presumption, full and precise reasons for any of his dispensations. But surely we may learn that importance and usefulness are not confined to publicity—that we must be willing to be hid as well as displayed—that a great work requires much preparation—and that before we teach we must learn—"not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fal. into the condemnation of the devil."

But seeing this was the place where he was brought up, why is it said "and he came to Nazareth?" Because he had been absent. He went to Bethabara, beyond Jordan, to be baptized of John. After this he was forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, tempted of the devil. Then he "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." The case was this. Though he was full of courage, he was to deal prudently. He knew that a prophet is not without honour, save in his own

country, and among his own kindred. Familiarity, if it does not produce contempt, reduces veneration. They who have seen a man in his youth, and mingled with him in common life, are less likely to reverence him as a teacher of religion. It might have been supposed that our Lord would have furnished an exception to this proverb, owing to his wisdom and sanctity—But what, to many, are wisdom and sanctity—Yea, and divinity too, if unconnected with worldly recommendations! He knew what was in man, and was acquainted with the prejudices of the Nazarenes against him. And therefore he did not begin his public career at home. For a considerable time he visited other parts; till, by his preaching and miracles, he had acquired a renown which would serve favourably to introduce him among his townsmen and relations—Thus he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up—

And what did he there? "He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day." Surely his example has the force of a law to all his followers; especially as we are here informed that it was "his custom" to do this. But do all who wear his name constantly observe "the holy of the Lord," and repair to "the place where his honour dwelleth," for devotion and instruction? Are they not often detained by trifling excuses, which they know, and their domestics know, would keep them from nothing—but the sanctuary! Surely these things are as proper for us as for him; and we need the frequency of them as much as he did—

"And he stood up for to read." Reading the Scriptures was always a part of the synagogue service: and it tended much to maintain the knowledge of Moses and the prophets. It deservedly and commendably occupies a large share of the Liturgy of the Established Church. It should be a part of our employment whenever we assemble and meet together for the worship of God. It is a great advantage to the ignorant and illiterate who cannot read for themselves. It honours the written Word as the supreme authority in our religion. It removes prejudice, by showing the people where the preacher finds his doctrine, and that even his language harmonizes with the words the Holy Ghost useth. It solemnizes the mind, and prepares the heart for devotion and instruction.

Let us be always in time for this part of divine service.

And let us love the Scriptures, and read them more than we have done in our closets and in our families. They are the charter of our privileges, the warrant of our hopes, our guide and guard through the wilderness, our song in the house of our pilgrimage. "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

SEPTEMBER 2.

"*The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.*"—Daniel xi. 32.

These words stand in the midst of a prophecy respecting Antigonus, that bitter enemy of the Jews. A recital of his cruelties would harrow up all our feelings. Suffice it to observe, that God would never permit such wretches to exist, could he not bring good out of evil, and make the wrath of man to praise him. "O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." As fire separates the dross from the ore, and the fan expels the chaff from the wheat, so persecution serves to distinguish between the true servants of God and mere professors. Hence this tyrant would discover the faithless Jews: "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flattery"—But not so with the upright in heart. Their piety would be unyielding and invincible, resisting his usurpations, and bearing his menaces and sufferings: "But the people that do know their God, shall be strong, and do exploits."

"Exploits" are rare, difficult, remarkable, and illustrious actions. And for these God's people are prepared by their knowledge of him, and the strength they derive from him. They are not common characters, but a peculiar people. They "do more than others;" they "are men wondered at." Noah builds an ark, and sails over a deluged earth. Moses divides the Red sea, and fetches water out of a flinty rock. Elisha made iron to swim. Elijah carried the key of the clouds for three years and six months, and drought and rain came at his bidding. Joshua ordered the sun to stand still while he finished his victory. "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae: of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about

in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy."

They have done, therefore, exploits as sufferers. And here we need not refer to the book of martyrs, but to common and private life. The afflictions of the righteous have been often many, and peculiarly trying; but they have surprised the world, who were ready to deem their experience and conduct under them unaccountable and incredible. They have not only submitted, but acquiesced; they have not only exercised patience, but "all long-suffering with joyfulness." "When troubled on every side," they have "not been distressed." Yea, they have "gloried in tribulation also:" and been able "in every thing to give thanks." We admire those who magnanimously bear the necessary excision of a limb. But the Christian himself is the operator, as well as the subject: *he* plucks out his right eye; *he* cuts off his right hand; *he* crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts.

They have done exploits as scholars. It would be deemed no easy thing to acquire an entirely new language, especially when advanced in life. But we have known Christians, even after they have been old, acquiring "the language of Canaan," not a word of which they knew before, and speaking it fluently, and with little of their native dialect. Deciphering is a difficult art. Dr. Wallis, the celebrated mathematician, was many months ascertaining from the characters the sense of a French dispatch which had fallen into our hands. But Christians can read and explain the most perplexing dispensations of Providence, and can discern the salvation of God, even in the hand which seems lifted up to destroy—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

They do exploits as merchants. They traffic not for time, but eternity. They trade not to the ends of the earth, but beyond the heavens. They deal not in corruptible things, such as this world's goods, but in all spiritual blessings. They run no risks, but are sure to gain unsearchable riches. One bargain alone is enough to signalize and immortalize them; "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

They do exploits as travellers. The march of the ten thousand Greeks under Zenophon; the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan under Moses; the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, were in the eye of the angels far inferior to the passage of a soul from a state of nature into the glory that shall be revealed. What a distance to reach! What difficulties to pass through! What an end to attain!

They do exploits as warriors. It is a great thing to take a city? But "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his own spirit, than he that taketh a city." Is it a thing of renown to take a kingdom? But "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." "Who is he that overcometh the world? He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." Yet this is only one of his adversaries: "for he wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." A victor has sometimes barely vanquished; another conflict would have ruined him. But the Christian having done all, stands, and could defeat as many more—Yea, in all these things he is more than conqueror.

They have often also distinguished themselves as donors and benefactors. Witness the Israelitish women at the erection of the tabernacle. "Moses made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the looking-glasses of the women which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." When we consider the value of a looking-glass to a female, that it is the first and last object she regards as she enters and leaves an apartment, how desirable it is that she should impress, and how necessary it is to be able to adjust every article; what self-denial was here! For we are to judge of things, not by their intrinsic worth, but the estimation in which they are holden—It was saying, we care not how we appear, if the service of God be provided for. What immense treasures did David lay up in his lifetime and leave at his death for the building of the temple, as you may see in the last chapter of the first book of the Chronicles. And read what Paul speaks of the poor Macedonians: "In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves: praying us with much entreaty, that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." But see the people at the treasury. Many gave, and the rich cast in much; but a poor widow cast in two mites; and this was the exploit of the day. For they gave of their abundance; but she gave all she had, even all her living. There may be wonders and prodigies of kindness and liberality where very little is given, if there be a willing mind. The Lord looketh to the heart.

These exploits therefore are not confined to any particular rank. No condition, however humble, is excluded from moral and religious distinction. The poor as well as the rich, servants as well as masters, can be *truly*

great. They can be "great in the sight of the Lord," and can obtain "the honour that cometh from God only."

SEPTEMBER 3.

"*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?*"—Micah vii. 18.

To whom will ye liken me? or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. God is a being incomparable in his essence, his perfections, his works, and his ways. Hence the sacred writers are constantly expressing their admiration of him. Sometimes they extol the displays of his wisdom; sometimes those of his power; sometimes those of his holiness. But they never utter themselves more forcibly and feelingly than in the praise of his goodness. Hence David exclaims: "Oh! how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" And if this be exemplified in the provisions of nature and providence, how much more in "the exceeding riches of his grace!" "Herein is love." "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?"

—Pardon regards guilt. Guilt is obnoxiousness to the penalty of the law we have transgressed: for the soul that sinneth it shall die. Pardon frees us from the sentence of condemnation, absolves us from all liableness to suffer; and gives us the security arising from innocency. Now in the exercise of this, God is supreme and unrivalled. None pardons like him.

None so peculiarly. He displays at once his justice and his mercy: his justice with regard to our surety, his mercy with regard to us. He laid on him the iniquity of us all; and was pleased to bruise him, and put him to grief, and make his soul an offering for sin. Thus he magnifies his law, preserves the honour of his government, declares his righteousness, and shows himself just in justifying the ungodly; and the offender is not allowed to escape without being reminded that he had forfeited his life, and owes every thing he has to mere favour. For with regard to himself this pardon is an act of mercy. The law was holy, and just, and good, and entirely worthy of God; and this was true of the penalty as well as of the precept. He could righteously have inflicted the penalty upon the person of the transgressor; and his willingness to release him, and admit a substitute, was an exercise of pure grace, to which he was not obliged. Besides, if he required an atonement he provided the propitiation, and it was his own Son, whom he spared not. How wonderful is this! A king cannot thus at once equally display his justice and his mercy. If he punishes the rebel he shows his justice, if he spares him he shows his mercy; but he cannot equally evince both in the same instance—This is the prerogative of God only—But

> "Here the whole Deity is known;
> Nor dares a creature guess,
> Which of the glories brightest shone,
> The justice or the grace."

None pardons like him—None so readily. Men, if not implacable, are yet commonly backward to forgive. They often assume airs of haughtiness; require the offender to feel the effects of his misconduct; exact from him the most trying humiliations; and always think it enough to comply after they have been frequently and earnestly implored. Every thing shows that it is their strange work, and not natural to them. But the Lord not only waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy, but is ready to forgive. It is true that he requires confession and submission—and must require them; but it is equally true that he himself encourages and excites them. The first advance is always from him; and he not only makes the overture, but beseeches us to be reconciled.

None pardons like him—None so perfectly. He forgives our trespasses, however numerous, and however aggravated. "Come," says he, "and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In confirmation of this assurance he has added examples, and shows us in his word characters the most criminal and hopeless obtaining mercy. He also tells us that in this dispensation he is not to be judged of by a human standard; men's usages and conceptions with regard to forgiveness being infinitely below his own: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." So he pardons fully and for ever. As far as the East is from the West, so far he removes our transgressions from us. He throws them behind his back. He casts them into the depths of the sea. If sought for they shall not be found. He not only forgives them, but forgets them; he remembers them no more for ever. He retains no anger, no indisposition towards us. He delights in us as if we had never sinned. He restores us to the most intimate friendship. He allows us not only to dwell in his house, but to lean upon his arm, and repose on his bosom.

There are some who not only believe all this, but know the truth of it from their own experience. They were once children of wrath, even as others; but they were made to see and feel their desert, and to cry, with

the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner. And they were heard and accepted in the Beloved. They are now passed from death unto life, and their grateful hearts are saying, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven! But how dreadful is the condition of those who are strangers to this remission! You lie open every moment to all the afflictions of life, the sting of death, and the damnation of hell. How is it you can enjoy any thing like pleasure by day, or sleep at night, while you know that lying down and rising up the wrath of God abideth on you? But if willing to return you need not despair. There is forgiveness with him. O hear his voice. Come and seek a share of this blessedness for yourselves. He will in no wise cast you out. But the time wherein he may be found is short and uncertain. Therefore seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

SEPTEMBER 4.

"And David was greatly distressed."
1 Sam. xxx. 6.

IN a fit of despondency and imprudence, having resolved to escape into the land of the Philistines, David went to Achish king of Gath. After dwelling some time in the royal city, he requested the king to give him some place in the country for his residence: and Achish gave him Ziklag. After dwelling there a full year and four months, war broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites, and he was called upon by Achish to accompany him to battle, and was made the commander of his body guard. Here he was thrown into the utmost perplexity. He found himself under obligation to Achish; yet could not serve him without violating his conscience. If he fought against Israel, where were his patriotism and piety? And if he turned against the Philistines, where were his fidelity to his master, and his gratitude to his benefactor? God, who is always better to us than our fears, and has all hearts under his control, extricated him from this dilemma, through the jealousy of the lords of the Philistines, who insist on his being sent back. But while exulting in his escape from one difficulty, another befalls him: and we need not wonder at his being "greatly distressed" when we glance at the ingredients and circumstances of the affliction.

For when he arrived at Ziklag the "Amalekites had smitten it and burnt it with fire." It is never safe to boast of to-morrow; for we know not what a day may bring forth. Little can we imagine, when at any time we leave our home, what may occur before we return. It is a mercy if no evil befalls us, and no plague comes nigh our dwelling, and we find our tabernacle in peace. But Naomi, when her neighbours were congratulating her upon her return, exclaimed, "Call me not Naomi, call me Marah; for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." And David, when he returned to his residence, found his house and all his property consumed to ashes! Nor was this all—

They had taken away the women and the children captives. Persons may be tried not only in their circumstances, but in their connexions; and relative distress is frequently keener than even personal. Some of us have been bereaved, but it was in the course of nature. The objects of our attachment died in peace. We watched their bed of languishing with tenderness; we closed their eyes; we laid them in the grave; and have often repaired to the spot that contains their endeared dust. But David's family was carried off by an infamous and cruel banditti to be sold, or used as slaves. Yea, he knew not at the time but they had been degraded, violated, tortured, or even put to death.

The complicated calamity was also perfectly unthought of—"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." After a march of three days, cheered by every step that brought him nearer home, and rejoicing in the eager hope of finding rest in his dwelling, and delight in the embraces and hailings of his household, all this mass of misery meets him like a spectre instantly rising up in the road. He knew, he suspected nothing of the whole, till his eyes told him by the ruins, and his ears by the tale of the roofless sufferers, of the captivity of his family. We are prepared for what comes on gradually, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. But what befalls us unawares often upsets the mind, and we have hardly the power of reflection, through which alone religion can operate. When the sky is lowering, and the waves begin to curl, and rise, and roll, the mariner takes in the sail: but here the storm burst without a signal.

In addition to all this, he had to bear the reproaches and menaces of his attendants and townsmen: "for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man in his sons and in his daughters." We can excuse their grief, but what can we say of the brutality of their purpose? How unenviable are the situations of public and official characters! If ever they

sleep, it is seldom on beds of roses; or if they do, the roses retain their thorns, and the fragrance ill pays for the piercings. Is good accomplished or a glory gained? They divide it with others, or share it with chance. Does disaster or calamity occur? All is imputed to them, even to the result of pure accident. They are made answerable, not only for wisdom and diligence, but for success, for events, yea, for the seasons and elements themselves. How often did the Jews talk of stoning Moses! If they wanted bread, or water, or met with any difficulty, he was the cause or the occasion of it. Vulgar and ignorant minds must always have some object at hand against which to vent their feelings.

Finally, we see the deep impression the catastrophe made upon the mind of David—"Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no power to weep." He wept thus though a brave man: true courage is always tender. And he wept thus though a good man: grace does not deprive a man of sensibility: resignation and patience cannot be exercised without much feeling. The degree of grief is not always to be judged of by cries and tears. In general, noisy sorrow is superficial, as the deeper stream is the more silent. But it was otherwise here—"David was greatly distressed"—

Yet he was a man after God's own heart. If it were a rare thing for the godly to suffer, we might draw from our sufferings suspicions concerning our relation to God. But what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Since through much tribulation the heirs of glory must enter the kingdom, these trials should rather be viewed as way-marks. They are really the effects and tokens of love. We shall see this hereafter; we should believe it now: and till we walk by sight we should be concerned to walk by faith.

"They all are most needful; not one is in vain."

They are to try our trust, to exercise and strengthen our principles, and to bring us to the throne of the heavenly grace. And well will it be if we are led to follow the example of David, as it will appear in the next article—But "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

SEPTEMBER 5.

"*But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*"—1 Sam. xxx. 6.

It was a dreadful day for David and his fellow-sufferers, as we have seen in the foregoing article. But if the rest had no God in this time of evil *he* had one; David encouraged himself in the Lord *his* God. He seldom addressed him in the Psalms without saying, "My God." The same privilege have all his people: they have a God who claims them, and a God whom they claim—"God, even our own God shall bless us." "This God is our God for ever; he will be our guide, even unto death."

"All people will walk every one in the name of his God." All have some rock; but "their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges." They who love and serve the creature more than the Creator are really worshippers of idols; and what wonder if the God they have forsaken for very vanity should say to them, in their distress, "Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble." Hence they faint in the day of adversity. All their resources are found worse than nothing. A Christian would rather perish than think of such comforters and deliverers—"God," says he, "is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever"—"It is good for me to draw near to God." So it is with David—"David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

But in what pertaining to the Lord his God did he encourage himself? and in which all his followers may encourage themselves also? He encouraged himself in his relations. One of these he has mentioned, describing the confidence he derived from it: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." He encouraged himself in his perfections. How relieving is the thought of a Being whose mercy endureth for ever; whose understanding is infinite; whose power is almighty; whose presence is everywhere! He encouraged himself in his engagements. They are great and numberless. They are adapted to all that we can feel or fear. They insure grace and glory; and withhold no good thing from us. And they are all yea and Amen, in Christ Jesus. And therefore David, for their certainty, calls them a covenant, which used to be confirmed by oath and sacrifice; and says, "although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.' He encouraged himself in the belief of his providence. He knew that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father, and that the hairs of our head are all numbered. All my times, said he, are in his hand. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He encouraged himself in the review of his dealings. First, his dealings with others. "Our fathers trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver

them." Secondly, his dealings with himself. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

Ah! Christian, know your resource. Hear your God saying, Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me. Make use of him as your "hiding-place," your "resting-place," your "dwelling-place." Beware in your distress of crooked policy, of unlawful means of relief, of impatience, of dejection. By nothing can you so much please God as by your confidence in him; and by nothing can you so recommend your religion as by showing the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeping your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Check therefore every tendency, not only to murmuring, but to despondency; and after the example of your model this evening, say, "What time I am afraid I will trust in thee." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

SEPTEMBER 6.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."—John i. 14.

THERE is something peculiar in this name —"*The Word.*" John is the only one that applies it to the Messiah. Yet it is not on this account the less entitled to regard, for John wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost; and he has supplied many things omitted by the three former Evangelists. But the origin of the title has given rise to much inquiry. Some have supposed John derived it from Plato the philosopher, and some from Philo the Jew. Yet why should we suppose that he borrowed the term at all? Why not consider it as one of the words the Holy Ghost useth? and which it is possible the writer did not *fully* understand himself?

Yet what is the term designed to intimate? His office and designation? That as by his reason and speech a man displays his mind and will, so Jesus makes known the mind and will of God? "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Three things may be safely observed.

First, John uses it to express a *person.* Nothing would be more forced and false than to suppose "the Word" means an attribute only, that is, the wisdom of God. Of what use would it be to tell us that the wisdom of God was in the beginning with him? Could it ever have been separate from him? And how could this wisdom be made flesh, and dwell among us?

Secondly, That this person had *a being previously to his birth.* For in saying the Word was *made* flesh, John intimates that he was something before this took place. Yea, he fully expresses this—"In the beginning was the Word"—In the beginning of what? The Gospel? No, but the world—The creation of all things. How useless and absurd to say that he was in the beginning of his own ministry!

Thirdly, That his pre-existence was *a Divine existence.* Observe the name of God is given to him—and "the Word was God." And the creation is ascribed to him: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Could all this be affirmed of him, without the possession of Deity? Had he been but a man, an angel, a super-angelical creature, would John have expressed himself in a way so proper to lead men into error and idolatry—telling us not only that he was with God, but that he was God, and making him the fountain of all life and being? Is not this enough to entitle him to all adoration and praise?

But "the Word was *made flesh.*" Sometimes flesh signifies the corruption of human nature; as when it is said, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." And "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit." At other times it intends only the composition or constitution of humanity. Thus we read, "Except these days should be shortened, no flesh could be saved;" that is no human being. And thus it is to be understood here: and as the Jews used the term flesh for man, there would be nothing strange or harsh in the phrase, "The Word was made flesh:" it was precisely the same as saying, The Word became man—Campbell therefore renders it, "The Word became incarnate."

But did he cease to be what he was, in becoming what he was not? Here was union, but not transformation. He was God before he was in the flesh, and he was God after; but he assumed our nature into personal subsistence with his own. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself also took part of the same. He took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham. Hence in the Scripture many things are ascribed to him which will neither agree with his divinity or humanity separately. "Unto us a child is born;" this does not belong to him as Divine. And his name shall be called "the mighty God;" this does not belong to him as man. Man is a spiritual and a material being; spiritual as to his soul; material as to his body. Yet no confusion is produced by this conjunction: both retain their respective properties. It is

not the body that thinks and reasons; and it is not the soul that eats and drinks. It is not the humanity of our Lord that is everywhere present; and it was not his divinity that was crucified. He died as man; he fills all things as God. We pretend not by these reflections fully to explain the subject: but they are sufficient to show that there is no contradiction or absolute impossibility of conception in the case. But we allow with the Apostle, that "God manifest in the flesh is a great mystery" —And what is not mysterious? Who can explain the most ordinary appearances and the most undeniable operations of nature? But this is also "a great mystery of *godliness*." It meets our condition. It brings down Deity to our reach. It renders him our example, our sympathizing friend, and the propitiation for our sins. And—

> "While Jews on their own law rely,
> And Greeks of wisdom boast;
> I love the Incarnate Mystery,
> And there I fix my trust."

"And *dwelt among us*." This adds to his humiliation—"Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth?" He might have been incarnate, and have dwelt in heaven, and among angels. But he dwelt among us. And not in the highest style of our being. Some of our race live in palaces; but he had not where to lay his head. They travel in ease and splendour; he travelled on foot, and was "weary with his journey." We only read of his riding once, and then it was on a colt, the foal of an ass. They are attended with officers of state; he was despised and rejected of men. They come to be ministered unto, but he to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Dwelling expresses permanent residence. He had appeared of old, and had visited the children of men, but he soon again disappeared. But now he took up his abode with us for thirty-three years, well satisfied to keep out of heaven, and to remain here as long as there was any thing for him to do or suffer. This shows intercourse. He occasionally retired; but it was to prepare by privacy for publicity. He never refused society. He was present at the marriage of Cana in Galilee. He accepted the invitation of Levi when he made a great feast and bade many. He also received sinners, and did eat with them. There was nothing in him like extravagance, or sinful indulgence; but there was nothing monkish, abstemious, and austere, as we learn from the comparison and the reflection: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." This was a slander, but as he went about doing good, so he never by his example taught his followers to shun their fellow-creatures, and exclaim, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; I am holier than thou." The truth is, we are to be in the world, but not of it. The religion of the Gospel calls us both out of the world and into the world—out of the world as to its maxims and temper—into it as a field of labour and a sphere of usefulness, where we are to be diligent in business, to relieve the distressed, to teach the ignorant, to reclaim the vicious. We are to fill our days; and live as long as we breathe. When Calvin was requested to leave off writing and correcting, What, said he, shall the master come and find me doing nothing? And Philip Henry's remark is well known, who, when desired to spare himself, said, What are candles for but to burn out?

SEPTEMBER 7.

"*I will fill this house with glory.*"—Haggai ii. 7.

Two things are certain. First, that "this house" means the temple reared by the Jews after their return from Babylon. Secondly, the "glory" with which it was to be filled was to arise from the coming of the Messiah to dignify it—"For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come —and I will fill this house with glory." This was to be more than a substitute for all the distinguished articles that were found wanting in the second temple, compared with the first: and to account for the assurance, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former."

Accordingly he appeared on earth while this house was standing, and was often found in it. The first time we read of his being there was as an infant to be presented to the Lord. The offering that accompanied the dedication was "a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons." As this was the sacrifice allowed for the poor, in lieu of any thing more valuable, it shows the lowly condition into which he had entered. Few, therefore, for want of splendour, would notice the event. But this was not the case with all; and another kind of greatness was displayed. "There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared

before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, and she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." At the age of twelve we find him in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." How was his glory shed abroad when he "went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." And "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

Here was now found in the temple the body, of which the law was a shadow: the reality of all the types; the accomplishment of all the prophecies; the fulfilment of all the promises; the consolation of Israel. Many eminent characters had entered the former temple: but he was fairer than the children of men; and higher than the kings of the earth. Think of his innocency. The former temple had seen good men, but never a sinless one. But he was harmless, holy, undefiled, separate from sinners: in him was no sin. Think of his devotion. What faith! what trust! what spirituality of mind! what fervour of love! what ardour of zeal! Such worship had never been rendered in Solomon's temple—no, nor by Adam in Paradise; nor by the angels in heaven. Think of his preaching there. "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation;" and in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and he spake as never man spake. O to have heard him, when early in the temple he said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." O to have heard him at the passover, when, on the last, the great day of the feast, he stood and cried, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." Other teachers received a measure of the Spirit; but he was *full of grace and truth*. Think of his divinity. He could say, "There is one in this place greater than the temple." In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He was the Lord of all—Well might he fill the house with glory.

The temple once thus honoured has long since been consumed. But there are temples sacred to his service now: and the Saviour's presence is the glory of them. And every believer loves the habitation of his house; and repairs to it, not for the stateliness of the edifice, the superbness of the decorations, or the effect of the ceremonies—if there was every thing in it that was Jewish, Pagan, or Popish, it would all be nothing, less than nothing and vanity, unless he could see the beauty of the Lord; but because he has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." And they find him faithful to his word. They hear his voice; see his goings in the sanctuary; taste that he is gracious; and are made joyful in his house of prayer: and though it may be a private room, or an upper chamber, when thus blessed and ennobled, it is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Christians themselves are a building fitly framed together, and growing unto a holy temple in the Lord. Know ye not, says the Apostle, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? And he is all in all as to his church: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

There is yet another temple; and this too is filled with the same glory—"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

SEPTEMBER 8.

"*For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.*"—Isaiah xiv. 1.

The Jews were carried away captive to Babylon. But they were not to be destroyed there, or to remain. "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." With regard to this restoration, two things are mentioned in the words before us.

The one is the source of it—mercy, free and undeserved mercy: "I will have *mercy* on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land." And this is the principle which always, as far as good is concerned, whether in possession or hope, leads him to deal with us.

The other is the consequence. Many, leaving their own country and their idols, would return along with them; others would unite with them after their return: "And the *strangers* shall be joined *with them*, and they shall *cleave* to the house of Jacob." And here we see a little of the design of God in their captivity. It was indeed to punish them for their sin; but his punishments are corrections; and he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He would humble them, and prove them, and reclaim them; and not only do *them* good, but render them useful to *others*. And who can tell how many have had reason to bless God for the dispensation! For when they were conquered and enslaved, they carried the elements of their religion along with them, diffusing their inspired writings, and spreading the knowledge of the true God. Many pious characters rose to distinguished eminence and influence during their stay in Babylon. Several very glorious and publicly witnessed miracles were performed on their behalf. Thus God pleaded the cause of his people, and showed that though he chastised them, they were the seed which the Lord had blessed. And their deliverance was so wonderful, and attended with such unparalleled circumstances, that it not only at first seemed to themselves more like a pleasing dream than a reality, but induced the very heathen to say among themselves, "The Lord hath done great things for them." Hence many became proselytes, and professed the God of Israel.

Thus the Lord can change the darkest skies, and turn the shadow of death into the morning; yea, and by our sufferings not only bless us, but make us a blessing. The little girl that waited on Naaman's wife had been torn from her parents, and carried away captive, but she was the means of honouring the God of Israel. The persecution which scattered the brethren from Jerusalem spread the Gospel in all the directions in which they fled. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the churches. The dreary imprisonment of Bunyan for twelve years, occasioned his writing the Pilgrim's Progress and the Holy War. The works of many other authors, whose praise is in all the Churches, were the produce of their privations and hardships. Who can tell in how many ways we may be able to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted?"

But we here see that religious conviction produces attachment to the people of God. Man is by nature a social being. When sin falls in with this disposition, it is corrupted, and becomes a most powerful auxiliary of iniquity; but when grace meets with it, the bias is sanctified, and operates after a godly sort. The new creature feels the want of new associations; and here, as in every thing else, like attracts like. Hence Ruth, though a Moabitess, said to her Israelitish mother-in-law: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." And as soon as Saul of Tarsus came to Jerusalem, he "assayed to join himself to the disciples." So it is with all true converts; they easily abandon the sons and daughters of vanity and vice to "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you." They can now say, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." In them "is all my delight." They will be joined with them, and cleave to them in their assemblies as fellow-worshippers; in their communion as Church members; and in their practice and experience as joint workmen in God's building, labourers in his husbandry, soldiers in his army, and followers in his ways.

Here is a good test by which you may judge yourselves. What would make you most happy in your retirement? Would it be this confidence of faith? "Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear thy name." What is your principal desire when you consider your own condition and that of others? Is it this? "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto them that love thy name?"

Happy they who can pray, "Deliver me from men of the world, who have their portion in this life!" I ask not to be numbered with the rich, the mighty, and the noble. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon. I long for their Shepherd, their pasture, their repose—

> "O may I see thy tribes rejoice,
> And aid their triumphs with my voice;
> This is my glory, Lord, to be
> Joined to thy saints, and near to thee."

And if the *subjects* of divine grace may be the *mediums* of it too, how much depends on our character and conduct! He that winneth souls is wise. Let us therefore walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Let us do every thing in our power to remove their prejudices. Let every thing in our religion be, not repulsive, but alluring; not only impressive, but amiable. Let us so hold forth the word of life as to be perpetually saying "We are journeying unto the place of which

the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." And if we are the means of bringing one individual from the world into the Church of the living God, we have done more than any conqueror who has delivered a whole nation from civil bondage. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

SEPTEMBER 9

To the law and to the testimony." Isaiah viii. 20.

THE "law" and "the testimony" are a fine representation of the Scripture. Both these names are often applied to it, especially in the book of Psalms. They are both significant and striking. It is called the law, to remind us of its authority, equity, promulgation, and penalty. It is called the testimony, because it contains the mind, the judgment, the deposition—the witness of God himself concerning all those subjects, which it is of importance for us to be acquainted with, especially concerning the way of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Gospel is therefore called "the witness which God hath testified of his Son." And our Saviour, speaking of the writings of the Old Testament, says, "They are they that testify of me."

To this word we are to appeal. We are to appeal to it *only*—"To the law and to the testimony," and to nothing else. This in various instances is eluded. A Jew admits the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be of God; and could you lead him to these *only* you might easily convert him to Christianity. But in his case they are surrounded with Talmadical and Rabbinical appendages, the errors, falsehoods, follies and absurdities of which can scarcely be conceived. These render Moses and the prophets almost inaccessible, or pervert their meaning; and little can be done unless you separate the vile from the precious, and lead them at once to *the* law and *the* testimony. A Papist admits the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament to be divine: and could you contend with him upon this ground only, a victory would be easily obtained. But he admits along with these the Apocrypha, tradition, the decrees of councils; and the word of truth is approached, if not through these, yet in full company with them, and can only speak as they approve. And there are Protestants who invite you into the temple of Revelation, but you must enter leaning on Calvin, or Arminius, or some other interpreter, who is to tell you how the responses of the sacred oracles are to be taken; for you cannot be trusted alone. Hence articles, and creeds, and systems, are drawn up by fallible men, who have no other sources of information than ourselves, and these are to be taken as including all the faith once delivered to the saints. But however large the vessel they may construct, it will not contain the ocean. Christianity is "all the fullness of God." If these formularies are designed and used as human and limited aids to help in arranging, remembering, or understanding the divine record, they may be not only unexceptionable, but useful. But how apt are they to grow in their claims, so that in time they are virtually regarded by many as of paramount importance with the Scripture itself. But to the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them; and they are to have no dominion over your faith. Stop nowhere on this side the great Teacher sent from God. If Moses and Elias were to appear with him in glory, the voice would cry, "Hear ye *Him*." If I called myself after any human leader, it should be an inspired one. I would call myself a Johnite after John, or a Paulite after Paul. But was Paul crucified for me? or was I baptized in the name of Paul? Let it be enough for me to be called a Christian after Christ. Every thing more is forbidden by himself: "Call no man master upon earth, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."

As we should appeal to it only, so we should appeal to it *wholly*—To the law and to the testimony, with every thing religious. We say religious, for this is the subject in question. Other things may be carried to other tribunals. In matters of learning, science, and commerce, reason may fill the judgment-seat. But here, in all cases, the authority of Scripture must decide. Four things in particular we must always take to this standard.

First, take your state to the law and to the testimony. Some never examine themselves. Others are satisfied to live year after year trembling between hope and fear. Others draw a conclusion in their favour, but it is a groundless one, and will terminate in the bitterest disappointment and anguish. It is a very serious thing to determine your condition before God. And yet how desirable is it! Even if you find yourself condemned already, it is well to learn it while deliverance is yet possible: and if you are justified by the Saviour's blood, how much will the knowledge of it conduce to the glory of God and your own comfort? But by what can you safely determine your state? The word is to judge you in the last day. Judge yourselves by it now.

Secondly, take your principles to the law and to the testimony. I need not inform you of what importance just sentiments in religion are: you are therefore commanded to

buy the truth and sell it not. But great differences with regard to what truth is prevail among those who call themselves Christians, and they cannot all be right. There are diverse and strange doctrines; but it is a good thing for the heart to be established with grace, by which the Apostle means the doctrines of grace. And here all our satisfaction must be derived from the conformity of our creed with the written word. Bring therefore your views of sin, of the fall, of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, the foundation of our acceptance with God, and the order and stability of the everlasting covenant; bring them all, and weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary. Like the Bereans, search the Scripture daily to see whether these things are so. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

Thirdly, take your experience to the law and to the testimony. Some ridicule all the various feelings in religion. But the subjects of Divine grace are well acquainted with them. And Christianity must be an experimental thing, for it must enter the mind, and affect the conscience and the heart, before it pervade the conversation and life. There is however much that is fanciful, and enthusiastical, and wild; and therefore it is necessary to bring all the influences and operations of this kind, and compare them with the work of the Spirit, and the effects of Divine truth in the soul, as described by the sacred writers.

Fourthly, take your practice to the law and to the testimony. Your religion is nothing without this. See whether your conduct—with regard to God—with regard to your fellow-creatures—and with regard to yourselves, be such as this word describes and enjoins. If you thus fairly appeal to the Scripture, it will doubtless censure and condemn you in many things; but do not consider it your enemy because it tells you the truth. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. The discoveries you will make may be, and often will be humbling; but the sacrifices of God are a broken heart. You will be gainers by a process, though painful, that checks self-righteousness, that induces you to rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh, and urges you to pray for more of that grace which is alone sufficient for you. Indeed the very willingness to come to this standard is a token for good. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Blessed is the man that can kneel and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SEPTEMBER 10.

"*Sit thou at my right hand.*"—Psalm cx. 1.

It will be remembered how our Saviour perplexed the Pharisees, by showing that these words were addressed by the Father to the Messiah, whom David calls his "Lord," though he was his "son." But let us notice the expression itself, and the more so because the expression occurs so frequently in the Scriptures. It may be considered as importing repose and refreshment after all his exertion and toil. For he did labour, as he said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, wherein no man can work." At the close of life therefore he could acknowledge, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And though from the state of his mind and heart, to do the will of him that sent him and to finish his work, was his meat and drink, yet he was no stranger to weariness and suffering. But he hath entered into his rest, having ceased from his own works as God did from his. He bleeds, he "dieth no more." "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Sitting at the right hand denotes pre-eminence. At the last day the saints are represented as at the right hand of the Judge. Joseph wished the right hand of his father to be imposed upon the head of Manasseh his first-born. At Solomon's right hand sat the queen, in gold of Ophir. The greatest honour a king can show to any person is to seat him at his right hand. Hence all the glories of empire therefore were to descend from this station, as we see in the Psalm before us. From thence his enemies were to be made his footstool; from thence he should send forth the rod of his strength out of Zion, and rule in the midst of his foes; from thence, in the day of his power, he should obtain a willing people, numerous as the dew of the morning; and from thence he should strike through kings in the day of his wrath, drink of the brook in the way, and lift up his head as more than a conqueror. Hence the Apostle considers it the extreme of dignity: "To which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" And again; "He set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet."

Much of this is at present unrealized. But we see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. And the view should gratify our affection Love de-

lights in the glory of its object. If therefore we love him in sincerity, after sympathizing with him in the garden, and smiting on our breast at the cross, what a satisfaction shall we feel to view him possessed of power over all flesh, all power in heaven and in earth, and exalted far above all heavens, that he might fill all things! John could not go on with his description of him without pausing to express the adoration of his heart; "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Let the view also encourage our hope. We are deeply interested in his elevation. It was expedient for us that he went away. In his ascension he received gifts for men. As glorified he gives the Holy Ghost. As exalted he is a Prince and a Saviour to rule and relieve his people, and to make all things work together for their good. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." He is our head and representative, and by reason of our union with him we are "quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ."

And let it wean us from the earth. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. But he is your treasure, and he is in heaven. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen. Follow him; and "seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." What an inducement was it to Jacob, at a period when nature dislikes a change, to leave his own country, and go down into Egypt, when he heard the message, "Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me ruler throughout all the land of Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me—and there will I nourish thee." At once his aversion and fears gave way. "And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." And what says Jesus to his people? Come up hither. I am Lord of all the region into which ye shall enter—Come, and be near me—Come, and be for ever with the Lord.

And let it embolden us, while here, to acknowledge and honour him. Were we to be ashamed of him, or to deny him, we should be far guiltier than Peter. For we run no such risk in confessing him as he did—He trembled for his life. And when he disowned him, his Lord was a prisoner at the bar, and going to be crucified, under a charge of blasphemy and sedition—But we deny him on the throne, angels, principalities, and powers being subject unto him, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."

SEPTEMBER 11.

"*Fear thou not; for I am with thee.*"
Isaiah xli. 10.

THERE are more than sixty admonitions against fear addressed in the Scripture to the Lord's people. And what do all these imply, but their proneness to apprehension, and the groundlessness of their alarms? Hence the injunction is never unaccompanied with an argument to enforce it. For whatever the men of the world may think, religion is wisdom, and its children are able to give a reason of the hope that is in them. Hence knowledge always befriends a Christian. It is injurious to the comfort of many, because their comfort is founded in delusion: they think themselves safe while their house is built upon the sand; and therefore a discovery of the truth must tend to distress them: but though the Christian may fear, every thing is safe and right with him; and therefore the more he truly examines his condition, the more he must be satisfied with it: his doubts are mistakes, his apprehensions are misapprehensions—He only needs to be informed of things as they really are, and he is free indeed. Hence nothing can be of more importance to the subjects of divine grace than just and clear views of their state and privileges; for though their safety does not depend upon the degree of their knowledge, their consolation is much affected by it—They that *know* his name will put their *trust* in him.

The presence of God is the most effectual resource against the fears of his people: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." This does not intend the essential presence of God by which he is everywhere. When his presence is spoken of in a way of promise, it refers not to a perfection of his nature (though this is always implied), but to his peculiar nearness and influence as their Saviour and their friend. He is in one place as he is not in another. He is in heaven as he is not on earth; and he is with his Church as he is not with the world—"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

What the Lord says to all his people he says to each of them individually, "Fear *thou* not; for I am with thee." And what fear will not this assurance prevent or remove?

Do your temporal exigences excite your fear! Fear thou not, for he is with thee to provide for thee. He sustained the Jews with manna from the clouds, fed Elijah by ravens, and multiplied the widow's oil and meal. You are not to look for miracles; but you may

look for the Lord, who performed these wonders of old. He is with you; and his hand is not shortened that he cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear—

> "And sooner all nature shall change,
> Than one of his promises fail"—

And what has he promised? Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure. O fear the Lord, all ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

Do your perplexities excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to guide thee. The Jews had before them a wayless desert; but to relieve them from their anxieties, the Lord furnished them with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. As this paused they rested, and as this moved they followed straight on, or turned to the right hand, or to the left, according to the direction of their leader, till it brought them to a city of habitation. You have the same advantage. You have the world before you, through which you must pass to reach a better, even a heavenly country. How much depends upon your course, yea, and upon every movement! And the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. Neither is it necessary, if he knoweth the way that you take, and will direct you with his eye. And he is with you for this very purpose: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Do your duties excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to aid thee. You are indeed called to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; to forgive injuries; to walk by faith; to have your conversation in heaven. You will not quarrel with these demands; you will acknowledge them to be just and good: but you will lament your want of conformity to them: and sometimes they may discourage you—They must indeed always dismay you, if you view them only in connexion with your own strength. But your sufficiency is of God. His almighty Spirit shall help your infirmities. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that hath no might he increaseth strength. His strength is made perfect in weakness.

Do your dangers excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to keep thee. It cannot be denied that you are surrounded with enemies, compared with which you are nothing in yourselves. But though a worm, Jacob shall thresh mountains. If God be for us, who can be against us?

> "A thousand savage beasts of prey
> Around the forest roam,
> But Judah's lion guards the way,
> And guides the traveller home."

Do trials excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to comfort thee. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." And his consolation is not only tender, but strong consolation, sufficient to bear up the mind under any burden, and to cheer the heart in every distress. "Yea," says one who had often been revived in the midst of trouble, "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *thou art with me*, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Death is a trying hour; but it should not appal you. You are not to judge by your present feelings what your experience will be when the season arrives. He is peculiarly with his people in their afflictions, and his grace is proportioned to the time of need—He will not, he cannot fail you in your last extremity: and you may say, with Dr. Grovenor, "I can smile on death, if God smiles upon me."

Well, here is enough in every period, in every condition, in every circumstance, to embolden and animate us—if we can but lay hold of it. But what is all this without faith? Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!

SEPTEMBER 12.

"*O thou preserver of men.*"—Job vii. 20.

The word may be rendered, and in some versions has been rendered, "O thou *observer* of men." And it is a true and an awful reflection, that "his eyes are upon the ways of men, and he seeth all their doings: there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." He is an unerring observer; an observer whose glance nothing can escape; an observer who records all he witnesses, and records it with a view to exposure and trial: for "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."—It has been contended too, that the connexion in which the term is found requires this translation: "I have *sinned*, what shall I do unto thee, O thou observer of men?" But in this, as in *almost* every other instance, we deem the present rendering preferable, and preferable even on account of the connexion. Here is a penitential confession; but in all repentance, at least in all repentance that is unto life, a view of the *goodness* of God is necessary, both to excite hope, and to produce godly sorrow: and it is here seen and acknowledged: for "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not con-

sumed, because his compassions fail not; they are new every morning"—

We need not endeavour to prove that man needs preservation. As he did not make himself, so he has no sufficiency of his own to sustain himself. If left to himself for a moment, he would relapse into nothing. He lives, and moves, and has his being in God. He is constantly surrounded with dangers, yet he is not sensible of even one in a thousand of them, and he is unable to ward off those he apprehends. And who among his fellow-creatures is interested enough, wise enough, powerful enough, always near enough, patient enough, to watch over and secure him! But God is infinitely qualified for the office, and he graciously condescends to assume the character of "THE PRESERVER OF MEN"—Let us bring this home to ourselves.

Why died we not from the womb? Why dropped we not when babes, from the hands of a heedless or unfortunate nurse, and, like Mephibosheth, become a cripple for life! Why fell we not a prey to the perils of infancy, childhood, and youth? How many victims of accident, of disease, and of mortality have we known? But we are the living, to praise him as it is this day. And wherefore? Ebenezer! "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

And if the Preserver demands gratitude for the past, he authorizes our confidence and comfort with regard to the future. Let us think of him, under this endearing relation, and in all the uncertainties before us, be encouraged—encouraged when we lie down, and have to pass through the darkness and dangers of the night season—encouraged when we rise in the morning, and have to go through the businesses and perils of the day—encouraged when we travel at the call of duty, or for the purpose of friendship or health: let us say, as we advance, "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast;" and as we return let us remember the promise, "Thou shalt know also that thy tabernacle is in peace, and thou shalt visit thy habitation and not sin"—Yea, in all the parts and passages of that life, in the midst of which we are in death, and know not what a day or an hour will bring forth, let us strengthen and cheer ourselves with the persuasion that nothing can befall us by chance, that all our times are in his hand, and that we are immortal till our work is done. A sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

But the subject has a peculiar bearing upon Christians. For while he is the Saviour of all men, he is especially so of them that believe. A man takes more care of his jewels, than of his common property; and is more concerned for the safety of his wife and children, than of his cattle. God's people are to him more than these images imply. Accordingly, we are assured that he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy He keeps them as the apple of his eye. Lest any hurt them, says he, I will keep them night and day. This is the promise made to every Israelite indeed; "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul." And the soul is the main thing. Now this is absolutely secured. Other things are only secured conditionally. The Christian may suffer from the strife of tongues, he may lose his substance, his health, and even his life—but he can never lose his soul. With regard to his eternal all, he can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." Thus he is not afraid of evil tidings, for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. My enemies are numberless and formidable, and I am as weak as I am exposed; but "the Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies." Thus it is said, "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." How lonely, dreary, terrifying the situation! But amidst the howlings of the wilderness, and the horrors of the woods, they shall dwell safely *there* and sleep soundly *there*. So David, when Absalom had driven him from his palace, and he had few troops to support him in the field, garrisoned himself in God: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

SEPTEMBER 13.

"For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person, yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."—2 Sam. xiv. 14.

JOAB was resolved to reconcile David to Absalom. For which purpose he "sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead." Though she is called "wise," she seems very little deserving of the appellation, unless she displayed more wisdom on former occasions, than she does in the present instance. For there is scarcely one article in the whole of her long wordy address that pertinently and justly bears upon the subject.

Joab indeed furnished her with the leading part of her story—for it does not deserve the name of reasoning. But he had an unjustifiable measure to accomplish, and therefore he did as well as he could, to make the worse appear the better cause. He was also aware "that the king's heart was toward Absalom." He knew what tune pleased David, and therefore he depended not on the goodness of the music, but the nature of the effect. And accordingly, weak and irrelevant as the statement was, it succeeded! For, as

> "He that's convinced against his will,
> Is of the same opinion still;"

So when a man is inclined to a particular course, a little child may lead him.

We may here remark, and it is of importance in reading the Scriptures to observe it, that the Holy Ghost does not sanction as righteous, or as true, every thing recorded in them. The sacred writers relate facts as they occurred, leaving us to employ our reason in distinguishing things that differ. We are not to believe all the arguings of Job's friends, because they are found in the book of Job: it is obvious that they sometimes laid down wrong principles, and at other times drew unfair inferences from right ones. And in the Ecclesiastes, Solomon more than once utters sentiments not as matters of his own credence, but as the language of worldlings, or libertines, whose objections he would answer.

Let us apply this to the case before us. The woman having by a kind of parable drawn from David a sentence of censure and condemnation, which, as she supposed, affected himself, she makes an application of it—"Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished." And then, to enforce her suit, she adds, "The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the Lord thy God will be with thee." She adduces two arguments. The first drawn from man's mortality: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect any person"—As much as to say, Amnon would have died, if he had not been slain by his brother. Absalom will die, and severity may hasten the event. Thou, David, though a king, art dying, and wilt become as one of the people—This was a poor reason for dispensing with civil justice, against a murderer and a fratricide. Yet the argument is true in itself; and there are cases on which it will be found to bear—cases of private and personal injury, and where we are required not to avenge ourselves. Has a fellow-creature offended you? The offender will soon be incapable of receiving forgiveness, and you will soon be beyond the power of exercising it. Whatsoever therefore thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, knowledge, repentance, or wisdom in the grave whither thou goest. Remember that anger *resteth* in the bosom of fools. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Especially, let not life close upon you before you are reconciled to your brother. Would you enter the presence of God implacable? Yet there is but a step between you and death—Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

The second is drawn from God's goodness: "Yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him"—And therefore, as if she would say, Resemble him and be like him, not only in power, but in clemency and kindness." This again is a poor plea in favour of the impunity of a public malefactor. We are not to spare those who deserve to suffer by the laws of the land, because God is merciful and gracious. The minister of God is not to bear the sword in vain. He is set for the punishment of evil-doers, as well as for the praise of them that do well. Yet the argument is true in itself; and applies to cases of private and personal office. *There* we are required to exercise forgiveness; and it is enforced by this very motive. Hence says the Apostle: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." To which we add the parable of the Saviour: "Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.—So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

SEPTEMBER 14.

"*We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect any person.*"
2 Sam. xiv. 14.

Here we are reminded that we are under a necessity of dying; that the effect is irretrievable; and the stroke without partiality.

—"We must needs die." The necessity was not original, but induced by the Fall. It resulted not from nature, but sin—"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned." All creatures die

yet we never speak of a mortal bird or a mortal beast, but only of a mortal man. He only deserves the epithet as a reproach. He only was made immortal, but he degraded himself from the dignity, and being in honour abode not, but made himself like the beasts that perish. *Now* it is appointed unto men once to die. It is the present law of their nature: and from history, observation, and experience; from the numberless accidents and diseases to which they are exposed; and from the infirmities and decays they feel in their bodies, the living know that they shall die:

— "And be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." When we see our little family asleep we are not alarmed or concerned, though they are unconscious of our presence, and for the time know not any thing; because we have it in our power to restore the sensibility when we please; yea, nature, if left to itself, will soon recover it. But while suspended over the breathless corpse, in vain we watch to see a movement—we speak in vain—and touch the cold cheek in vain—and we bury our dead out of our sight. We are not denying a future state of existence, but we have no restoration from the grave *here*. "O spare me," says David, "that I may recover strength before I go hence and am no more." "In the morning," says Job, "ye shall seek me—but I shall not be." Ah! could we regather their precious remains, and inspire and revive them; Rachel would no longer "weep for her children, and refuse to be comforted, because they were not;" Jacob would no longer say, "Joseph is not;" at the domestic table "David's seat" would no longer be "empty;" nor would the lonely friend heave any more at the thought, "we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company." But in vain we seek them—They are gone the way whence they shall not return—The places that knew them shall know them no more for ever.

— "Neither doth God respect any person." He does not overlook the little, or fear the great. He does not spare the poor from pity or the rich from favour. He is not moved by the venerableness of age or the charms of infancy. He gives the destroyer a universal commission, and orders him to strike impartially as to time, place, and manner. Youth, and beauty, and strength, and learning, and wisdom, and usefulness, lie down equally in the dust. "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath."

'But the wide difference that remains,
Is endless joy or endless pains"

SEPTEMBER 15.

"*He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*"—2 Chron. xxxiii. 2.

Manasseh, of whom these words are spoken, is a name proverbial for wickedness. This indeed is not invariably a sure rule to go by. A man cannot always be judged of by his infamy, any more than by his fame. Subjects have been called rebels when they have been only maintaining their lawful rights. Christians, because they were not understood by their calumniators, have been deemed enthusiasts when they have only spoken the words of truth and soberness. A public charity wears the dishonoured name of Magdalene, as if she had been a prostitute of the grossest description before she became a follower of our Lord, and ministered to him of her substance: whereas, however we explain her case as having been dispossessed of seven devils, it imports nothing against her previous virtue—But Manasseh well deserves all the infamy attached to his character. Witness the portrait given us by the pen of inspiration. Witness his oppression and cruelty—"Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other." The language is doubtless hyperbolical. But take it in the lowest sense consistent with truth, and how many persons under false pretences must have perished from public or private assassination, to gratify his avarice, ambition, or revenge. For it was not the blood of criminals, but innocent blood that he poured out in such torrents: and we have reason to believe that a great portion of the victims suffered for the sake of religion. Early ecclesiastical history asserts, we know not on what foundation, that Isaiah was sawn asunder by his order. Witness his idolatries—"He built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them." Witness his superstition—"And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom:" that is, he either sacrificed his offspring to Moloch, or dedicated them to the service of the idol, to be employed in the execrable rites of his worship. Witness his infernal alliances—"He observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards." Witness his open contempt of every thing sacred—"And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever." Witness his concern and zeal to corrupt others—"So Manasseh made

Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." From the parallel passage in the book of Kings, it is said, "He seduced them." His example, being in high life, would be very influential; but he exerted himself to lead others astray; and what means and resources could such a man employ! Witness the aggravations of his guilt. He was piously descended. His father was the good Hezekiah. The palace in which he had been brought up was none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. He had been under the care of pious priests and prophets. How much had he to unlearn! But he could not unlearn it; he had therefore to fight with conviction, and to overcome all the remonstrances, and to get rid of all the uneasinesses of conscience. He was also divinely warned from time to time: this is the meaning—"And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken." And this impenitence crowned and confirmed all his iniquity—

And now what think you of this representation, on the truth of which we can perfectly rely? Is it not painful and humiliating to reflect upon it! Yet this man was a partaker of our own nature; and if we do not resemble him, are we to glory in ourselves? Yea, ought we not to be thankful? All have not the same opportunities and temptations. Who can tell what we might have been had we encountered the perils in which others have been wrecked! What would any of us have been in a world like this without Divine restraints? "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God," would the martyr exclaim when he beheld the transgressor. Our Lord therefore leads us from the effects to the hidden cause, and fixes on the human heart. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." According to this decision the principles of the blackest crimes in practice lie in the recesses of many a character that appears fair to men. They are not suffered to spring up, but who will not honestly own that he has felt them in their most secret workings? Anger is the germ of malice; lust of sensuality; covetousness of theft. A desire to conceal the excellences of another from ourselves, or from the world, genders false witness. Hard conceptions of God lead to blasphemy. Ah! how little permission of Providence, or encouragement from circumstances, do the evils of our nature require, to bring them into exercise, and to degrade us to a level with the vilest of the vile! —Lord, what is man?

And what think you of the pardon and renovation of such a sinner! "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Should we not, in reading his history, have expected that he would perish a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men? But God's thoughts and God's ways are not ours. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound—Manasseh is saved!

When the elder brother heard of the reception of the prodigal, he was angry and would not go in. And such mercy as Manasseh experienced may be offensive to some now, who trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others. "Of what use are our good breeding and morals? What, are the dregs of depravity to be saved as well as we? and to enter into life with us?" Yes; and if you had the mind of Christ, and if you were like angels, who rejoice when a sinner repenteth, you would gladly hail any of your fellow-creatures who were the subjects of such free and sovereign goodness, and magnify the God that displays it. Every penitent may say with David, when recovered from his fall, "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy truth."

Such mercy may be abused; and it *is* abused by those who continue in sin that grace may abound; who hope that God, who is so ready to pardon, will not be severe to mark what they do amiss, but that when they can sin no longer, he will, by some extraordinary interposition, subdue their unwillingness, and deliver them from the condition in which they now voluntarily continue. But how dreadful is it to be evil because God is good! Is this likely to gain his favour? He is merciful, but his mercy is exercised in harmony with all the perfections of his nature. And his goodness is designed to lead us to repentance. And now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. His Spirit is now striving with you, but if you refuse to fall in with his motions he may righteously decline to address you in future, and hide from your eyes the things that belong to your peace. You cannot deserve his grace, but you may provoke his wrath, and nothing is so sure to provoke it as your "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace."

But such an instance of mercy should encourage you if you are disposed to return to the Lord. Then, however guilty, you have no reason to despair. "Come," says he, "and let us reason together; though your sins were as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they were red like crimson they shall be as wool."

And let it animate us in our concern for others. Whatever lengths they have gone, let us never consider any of our fellow-creatures abandoned, so as to give up prayer and the use of means—And let us use them in the faith of him who is mighty to save-Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

SEPTEMBER 16

"*I was wounded in the house of my friends.*" Zech. xiii. 6.

Friendship is a boon which has always been highly valued and extolled. It has been called the charm of life, and the balm of grief. He is deeply pitiable who has not a friend; and he is in a most privileged condition who has never had reason to complain, "I was wounded in the house of my friends."

We are formed for society; we love society; we need society; we derive much of our happiness from society; and yet in one way or another our connexions are very expensive things. There are here, so to speak, four kinds of wounds. First, those that arise from the honest and salutary reprehensions of our friends. Solomon commends these by way of contrast: "faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Instead of complaining of these, we shall be thankful for them, if we are like-minded with David; "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities."

Secondly, Those that result from their sufferings. Paul speaks of the comforts of love: but it has its sorrows too. If I love another, and in proportion as I love him, I shall make his case my own: I shall weep when he weeps: I shall bear his burden when he is oppressed: and perhaps suffer as much by sympathy as he himself suffers, when I hear him cry, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

Thirdly, Those which are produced by our being bereaved of them. There are few but have felt these losses; while some have had peculiar reason to sigh, "I sit, and am alone, as a sparrow upon the house-top"—"Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." Oh! the anxieties that precede—the anguish that accompanies—the dreariness that follows—the feeling of heart-desolation that arises at the sight of the walks in which we communed with them, the seats they occupied, the books they folded down, the flowers they planted—the nightly visitations of thought when darkness and wakefulness let in busy memory, to recall the past, and open the wounds afresh which time had tried to heal!

Fourthly, Those which are inflicted by their improper conduct. Even the sincere are imperfect; and may wound us by ignorance, rudeness, wayward temper, misapprehension, and censure without cause. But some are altogether vanity and lies. Their friendship is a mere flash of feeling. It is the working of selfishness, during which they make you their scaffolding, and then lay you aside. They only elevate to depress: they only flatter to spread a snare for your feet: they only insinuate themselves into your bosom to prove the viper there.

Thus therefore we often hear of being wounded in the house of friends. But though many make the complaint, few seem concerned to improve it. And thus they bleed in vain, while it is possible for them to derive a remedy for the poison, and to turn their losses into gain. In all these murmurings or lamentations about friends, we should do well to inquire whether we have done nothing to deserve what we suffer: for often we may trace our sin in our trials. The blame is not always on the side of the censured: the most complaining is frequently the most culpable. He that will have friends must show himself friendly; and attachment must be supported in the same way that it was gained.

We should also consider whether we do not complain without just cause. We talk of the wounds we have received, when perhaps they are hardly incisions skin deep. We are not to look for perfection; but remember, that as every relation in life is filled with fallen creatures, so it will necessarily partake of human infirmity. And what, are we to exact from others a faultlessness which they never met with in us? Neither should we become, in these cases, misanthropic; harbourers of suspicion; and railers against our fellow-creatures at large. David said, "All men are liars;" but it was "in his haste;" and he acknowledged his rashness and injustice.

We may, however, regulate and modify our regard, and especially our dependence and expectation: and we ought to hear the voice of the word, when it is feelingly enforced by events: "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

> "Then let us trust the Lord alone,
> And creature-*confidence* disown:
> Sure as on creatures we *depend*,
> Our hopes in disappointment end.'

Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord; and whose hope the Lord is. He will not, he cannot fail us. See the use the Prophet made of what he was compelled to acknowledge—"Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

Should we not also do well to make the conduct of our fellow-creatures towards us a glass in which to contemplate our conduct towards God? Then must our severity fall upon ourselves much more heavily than upon others. For what are our claims upon our

connexions compared with God's claims upon us! And what are the forgetfulness, and ingratitude, and perverseness, and unkindness, and treachery of those we have befriended, compared with the instances of vileness which our infinite Benefactor has constantly to witness in us? It is a good turn which Watts gives to our reflections upon the state of the Jews—

> "Great God! how oft did Israel prove,
> By turns, thine anger and thy love!
> There in a glass our hearts may see,
> How fickle and how false they be."

SEPTEMBER 17.

"*As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.*"—1 Peter i. 15.

Christianity is not only, as we see in the preceding verses, a system of grace, but of holiness also; and however the term may be abused or despised, the professors of the Gospel are to be distinguished as saints. Observe the extent and the enforcement of the obligation they are under.

They are to be "holy in all manner of conversation." The word conversation, as now used, signifies discourse; and no little of our religion consists in the sanctification of our speech: but the term never has this acceptation in the Scripture. There it always intends carriage, deportment, the course of action. It would be easy to prove this; but it is needless. Let us rather observe that no part of a Christian's conduct is to be uninfluenced by sanctity. He is to be holy "in all manner of conversation." His holiness is to be universal with regard to times, with regard to places, with regard to conditions, and with regard to circumstances. It is to appear not only in devotional exercises, but in common actions; and whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he is to do all to the glory of God. Not that he can be always distinctly thinking on this end; but by making the word of God his rule in all things, all he does has this tendency and effect. Paul attended to a thousand claims, yet as he made all his actions conduce to the same purpose, he speaks as if he had but one engagement; "This one thing I do." The husbandman manures, ploughs, sows, weeds, reaps, gathers into barns, threshes, fans, and sells; yet all he does is one thing; and that is comprised in husbandry. Even real religion is defective in its degree, but it is always impartial in its regards; and enables the possessor to say, "I esteem all thy commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."

The reason why we are to be thus holy is "because he who called us is holy." We must therefore resemble him. He everywhere proposes himself as our example; we are commanded to be followers of him as dear children; and we are renewed after the image of him that created us. Observe the excellency of holiness—It makes us like God—and like him in his highest excellency!

As we cannot be conformed to him, so neither can we love him without holiness. They are only the "saints of his" that can "rejoice and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." But they, being partakers of his holiness, feel congenial with his very nature, and delight in his law, his gospel, his ordinances, his people, as they all appear in the beauties of holiness.

Without holiness, too, it is impossible for us to enjoy him. How can two walk together except they be agreed? What communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness? Without holiness no man *shall* see the Lord—no man *can* see him: he is wholly unprepared for the state, the work, the pleasure. But the holiness which makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light insures the blessedness. God does nothing in vain; but he has thus wrought us for the self-same thing, and given to us the earnest of the Spirit.

It is therefore no easy matter to be a Christian indeed. Yea, it is an impossible one as to ourselves. But with God all things are possible. There are not only millions around the throne, but multitudes now living, who are his workmanship. "This people," says he, "have *I* formed for myself, they shall show forth *my* praise." Instead of endeavouring to fetch holiness out of yourselves, pray, with David, to the God of all grace: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Christians! under many of your present feelings, you are ready to conclude that your holiness will never be perfect. But be not dismayed. Consider what he has done for you already. How unlikely was it once that you should ever have valued what you now esteem, and have ever desired what you now above all things seek after! Had he been minded to kill you, he would not have shown you such things as these. He who gave you the will, thereby also furnished you with the pledge of the power. And we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Soon—what a prospect! you will be sinless, faultless! "It doth not yet appear what you shall be, but this you know, that when he shall appear, you shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is."

SEPTEMBER 18.

"*Lest any of you be hardened.*"—Heb. iii. 13.

Let us take some views of the evil against which we are here admonished. It may be

considered in reference to its *seat*. In many places it is spoken of as "the heart." "They hardened their hearts." "All the house of Israel are hard-hearted." It is sometimes represented as "the neck." Nothing can be more common than the expression of hardening the neck. The idea is taken from a refractory ox refusing the yoke, and expresses disobedience to the commands and rejection of the service of God. At other times it is represented as "the face." "They have made their face harder than a rock, they have refused to return." This marks insolence, impudence, shamelessness. But these are all related. The hardness of—the heart—of the neck—and of the face follow each other. Sin is always progressive; and transgressors wax worse and worse.

We may consider the hardness as *natural* and as *acquired*. The heart, though naturally hard, admits of an increase of hardness. Thus Paul says to the Hebrews, "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation." Every call of God we refuse renders us more callous. Every act of sin we commit reduces our awe of God's authority, and prepares us for another commission. The young man first dreads evil company, then endures it, then delights in it. Habits are formed by the repetition of actions; and "as well might the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as they learn to do good who are accustomed to do evil." The hardening of the heart is like the hardening of ice. When the water begins to freeze it will not bear the weight of a pin, but after some hours, or some days, it is capable of sustaining the heaviest pressure.

We may also observe in this hardness the *concern of the sinner*, and *the concern of God*. We read that "Pharaoh hardened his heart," and at the time it is said that "God hardened his heart." There is no doubt therefore that there is a part that belongs to God in this business. But what is it? And what can it be to accord with the perfections of his nature, and the language of his word? He cannot properly and absolutely harden the heart. But First, by his Providence he can expose men to those temptations which meeting with innate and indulged depravity will aid their impenitence. And Secondly, he can deny them the means of grace, or withhold or withdraw from them the influence that can alone render them efficacious. Thus God is said to give men up to "a reprobate mind;" and "to strong delusion to believe a lie." But he never acts thus judicially and penally, but as the effect of deep provocation. He never says, "Let them alone," till "they are joined to idols." "Israel would none of me, *so* I gave them up unto their own heart's lusts; and they walked in their own counsels." "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?"

Again: we may distinguish this hardness as *entire* and as *partial*. Christians are renewed in the spirit of their mind. The stony heart is taken away, and a heart of flesh is given. Yet our Lord said to his own disciples, "Have ye your heart yet hardened?" "And he upbraided them with the hardness of their heart." And Christians may be less lively in their religious duties and affections, not only than they ought to be, but even than they once were. It is indeed well if we feel this; it is a proof that *all* is not hard within: but the want of more sensibility of heart is a great practical evil; and will much lessen our comfort. And the evil is induced by sin; and by little sins as well as by great ones; and by omissions of duty as well as by actual transgression. We are peculiarly liable to this evil when we are indulged—"Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." What a difference do we perceive between David as an exile, persecuted from place to place, and as a reigning monarch! With regard to the former he had such tenderness that his heart smote him, when he had only cut off the skirt of his enemy's garment: but see the insults and miseries the King inflicted upon the Ammonites, after taking the city from its brave defenders. Who can bear success and gratification without injury? "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. Wherefore keep yourselves in the love of God. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

SEPTEMBER 19.

"*The sin which doth so easily beset us.*"
Heb. xii. 1.

By this we are to understand, according to Owen, what our divines call indwelling sin. Sin reigns in the children of disobedience. But this is *not* the case with the godly: sin shall not have dominion over them, for they are not under the law, but under grace. But though it is dethroned in them, it is not as yet destroyed. It still exists and exerts itself. And it may well be called "the sin which so easily besets us," being always near us to assail us in the world, the family, the church, the closet; yea, always in us, working our departure from the living God, vexing our peace, spoiling our performances, and rendering us susceptible of injury from external influences—"The sin," says the Apostle, "that dwelleth in me;" "another law in my members wars against the law of my mind;" and

the effects of which make me groan, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This, as the principle of corruption, and the source of all other evils, we should seek to subdue and destroy. And whoever would see this subject practically and *evangelically* treated, should read the admirable work of Owen, on "the mortification of sin in believers."

But there are various ways in which the same innate depravity may operate. Isaiah speaks of our all going astray, but says, "We have turned every one to his *own* way." And the expression of the Apostle has given rise to the notion of some particular sin to which we are more exposed or addicted than to another: and thus we often hear of a man's besetting sin, and easily besetting sin. And it is undeniable, that by outward circumstances, or natural temperament, some are more inclined to peevishness and fretfulness, some to anger and revenge, some to pride and vanity, some to intemperance and sensuality.

We should imagine that every one must be acquainted with his own peculiar propensity, especially after some course of years. But what is habitual is naturalized; we are blind to our own faults; self-love covers a multitude of sins, and this among the rest. Yet in many cases a man's ignorance, owing to the power and prevalence of the evil, must be mere affectation.

A man's easily besetting sin is—that to which he is most frequently tempted—and which he is most anxious to conceal—and the discovery and reprehension of which most mortifies and offends him.

Such a sin, unsearched after, unbewailed, unopposed, is incompatible with "simplicity and godly sincerity." If we regard the safety and welfare of our souls, however painful the result may be, we shall faithfully examine ourselves. And when we see where we have been most easily overcome, or drawn aside, we shall peculiarly watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. "A right spirit" will lead us to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear—"Blessed is the man that feareth always."

SEPTEMBER 20.

"*Master, I have brought unto thee my son.*"
Mark ix. 17.

This is the commencement of a very interesting and instructing narrative. The leading circumstances were these.

The man was in affliction. The affliction was indeed relative; but there are cases in which relative trials are more severely felt than even personal. And what relation is more susceptible of this than the parental? It was a child—an "only" child—possessed by "a dumb spirit," the distressing and fearful effects of which are thus described:—"wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him, and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away; and ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him." And this had been the case with the unhappy child from his infancy. As nothing is said of his mother, it is probable she was dead, or surely she would have accompanied this application.

But who does not feel for the pitiable condition of the father? And yet who knows what is good for a man in this vain life? But for this calamity perhaps this suppliant had never known or addressed the Saviour. How often is the valley of Achor the door of hope! How many can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted!" How often does trouble send us in search of the friend of sinners! It is the merciful design of it. It is the effect of it when sanctified, both in the conversion of the soul, and in renewed applications to the throne of grace all through life—

But observe the man's mistake. At first he goes and applies to the servants instead of the master: but the disciples "could not cast him out." And do not we often err in the same way? Do not our ignorance, carnality, and impatience lead us to stop at instruments? But they are nothing without God; and the sooner we are convinced of this the better, that we may not weary ourselves for very vanity. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." What can ministers do for you? If you come looking only to us, you will return as empty as you came. The excellency of the power is of God, and not of us. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." The heathens made gods of every thing that afforded them profit or pleasure: and we are paganish in the same way. But we are more criminal than they, because we know him, and know that with him is the fountain of life. And God is jealous of his glory, and is always provoked to destroy or render useless the instrument that robs him of his praise.

Despairing of all other help, the man now comes to Jesus himself—But see with what low apprehensions, and how full of suspicion and fear. "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Faith admits of various degrees, and we see it in the views and feelings of those who applied to him in the days of his flesh. How free from hesitation was the Centurion? "Speak but the word," says he, "and my servant shall be healed." The leper seemed to question his willingness to act: he "worshipped, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." But this man seems to doubt his power. And we sometimes do the same. We are not in

deed always aware of this. We presume that it is only his willingness to help that we question: but if we fully trusted in his power, how is it that our confidence sinks or wavers as ordinary means fail, or difficulties multiply! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Are we ever straitened in him? Yet the Jews, after all the displays of his omnipotence, said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness! Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" And even Moses himself staggered at the promise of God through this unbelief: "The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." Let us beware of this evil. Let us bring our faith to the apprehension of his power. Let us believe—that we may see the glory of God.

Our Lord both reproves and encourages him. The reproof was general in the expression, but it was designed to bear upon himself: "He answered him, and said, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me." The encouragement was conditional; but it precisely met his case. "If thy son be not recovered, the blame will lie at thy own door; it will be owing to no inability in me, but a want of faith in thyself: Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Thus he ascribes a kind of omnipotence to faith. And it is certain that faith can prevail with God. It can obtain the pardon of all sins. It can make us more than conquerors over all our enemies. It can bring us supplies for all our wants.

But let us observe the effect of our Saviour's declaration on the mind of the poor father. Loving his child, and longing for his deliverance; and knowing that every thing now depended upon his believing, and feeling in himself a sad struggle between faith and unbelief, he "straightway cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."—Let this be the subject of the following exercise

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SEPTEMBER 21.

"*And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*"—Mark ix. 24.

We have reviewed the narrative; but we may consider the words now read as the common language of religious experience. For what Christian is there that does not "cry out, and say with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" Four things are observable in the speaker.

First: he acknowledges his faith—"Lord, I *believe*." A man may be conscious of his own grace. Grace brings evidence along with it. It does not operate like a charm; nor are its operations to be classed with those occasional and superficial emotions which give no character to the person, or fixed bias to the disposition. It enlightens the understanding, it renews the heart, and becomes a governing principle in the life. Faith without works is dead. Living faith works by love.—Neither should we be unwilling to *own* what we experience; for the praise does not belong to ourselves; neither will it ever be claimed by any of the real subjects of it. Paul says, "I laboured more abundantly than all the apostles;" yet this was not the language of pride, but praise; for he adds, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." The fault of most is, that they deny their sin; but there are some who deny their grace. If they would do justice to their views and feelings, they must be constrained to own, that under all their complaints they have been made to differ from others, and that there is something which they have received. "If repentance consists in having the heart broken for sin, and from sin,—Lord, I repent. If love to thee is determined by a supreme desire to enjoy thee, and a fear to offend thee —Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. If faith is self-renunciation, and a reliance upon thyself only for salvation—Lord, I believe."

Secondly; he confesses the imperfection of his faith—"Help thou *mine unbelief*." A man may be alive and not in full health. A Christian, though renewed in the spirit of his mind, is not free from infirmities. Sin does not reign in his mortal body, but he feels a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, so that he cannot do the things that he would. We read, therefore, of "weak faith:" and our Saviour, addressing his own immediate disciples, said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Now as far as faith is wanting, unbelief prevails.

Thirdly; he speaks of his unbelief with sorrow—"He said *with tears*, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." It is pleasing to see sensibility in religion: and the Christian has a heart of flesh. His defects are his distresses; he groans under them, being burdened. Even his views of the love of Christ render his failures the more grievous.—He is not only affected with gross and scandalous offences visible to his fellow-creatures, but mourns over evils that are never noticed by natural men: such as dullness in duty, wanderings of thought in devotion, backslidings in heart, and the weakness and waverings of his faith and hope in God.—There is nothing

he more deplores than the remains of his unbelief; to these he can no more be reconciled than a convalescent can be reconciled to the remains of an offensive and painful disorder: such a man is thankful for returning health, but he sighs to be entirely well.

Fourthly, he applies to the Saviour for succour—"He cried, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; *help thou* mine unbelief." In the same way "the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." Had this prayer been improper, the receiver ought to have rebuked it; but he encouraged it. Let us not be afraid, with all the first Christians, and immensely the majority ever since, to call upon his name. Let us bring all our complaints to him. He is the author and finisher of faith. He has the words of eternal life. He quickeneth whom he will. He alone can relieve us; but in him all fullness dwells. You will make no progress in the Divine life if you think of advancing without him. Your growth in grace is not the offspring of your own resolutions and exertions, but your being under his agency, and receiving the supply of his Spirit—your living in the Spirit—walking in the Spirit. "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

SEPTEMBER 22.

"*Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.*"—Psalm lxviii. 10.

The acknowledgment refers to the gracious attention of God to Israel his pensioners, while they sojourned in the wilderness. They were destitute of all ordinary supplies, but "he commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full." We are not to look for miraculous provision; but God has not forsaken the earth, nor forgotten to be gracious. Let us observe the nature of this goodness, and the subjects for whom it is prepared.

The goodness of God appears in the produce of the ground, not only for man, but beast. Indeed man is concerned in the brute creation, and a deficiency with regard to them would materially affect his own welfare. But while the Lord cares for oxen, and causes the grass to grow for the cattle, he provides *corn* for the more immediate service of man. This forms, owing to our dependence upon it, what the Scripture calls "the whole *stay* and *staff* of bread." Judea was famous for this noble production. Moses calls it "a land of wheat." By a boldness of metaphor he speaks of "the kidneys of wheat." In the restored prosperity of this highly-favoured people, this commodity is not overlooked: "They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord for wheat"—"The barns shall be full of wheat"—

But let us pass from Judea to our own country; a land the Lord careth for, and whose inhabitants are "fed with the finest of the wheat." Who that has lately watched the springing of the earth, seen the valleys standing thick with corn, heard the little hills rejoicing on every side, and shouted as the precious treasure was safely conveyed into the garner, can help exclaiming, "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." And shall we expose ourselves to the reproach of the prophet, "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

Two things in this case may hinder or weaken the impression of his goodness. The one is the constancy of its return. It is easy to see that this is really an argument for greater thankfulness, unless we are to be evil because God is good; for surely the commonness of benefits multiplies them, and increases our obligation in a corresponding degree. Yet what is usual ceases to strike; what is frequently repeated, and returns continuously in a fixed and known regularity, arrives without emotion, and is regarded as a thing of course. When the manna first fell upon the ground, every eye would be turned towards heaven; but it soon became "this light food." And one reason why God sometimes withdraws or suspends an enjoyment is, that we may learn to feel the worth by the want of the blessing.

The other is, the means he employs. These keep us from seeing his hand; yet that hand worketh all in all. Away with the semi-infidelity of philosophers—He has established no mechanical laws which render his continual presence unnecessary. Instruments are nothing without his agency. If they succeed, it is only because he uses them. Second causes are moved by the first: "I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." David therefore fixes our eye at once upon God; and says, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof; thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness."

Miracles rouse attention for the moment,

but the ordinary workings of Divine Providence are no less truly wonderful in themselves: yea, the instant and immediate production of an effect develops less of his perfections, and the securing of it by various and numberless combinations, not one failing. We admire the word that multiplied five loaves into a sufficiency to feed a large multitude; but whose operation is it that annually increases the seed that is sown "and dies," thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold? If we have faith enough to see God only in extraordinary events, our godliness will be very occasional and limited. But there are some who live in his presence, who "walk with God," who confess him in every trial and comfort, and are preparing for that heaven where God is "all in all."

If some things would prevent our gratitude, others are adapted to excite and strengthen it. Let us, if we would be impressed with this goodness, think,

First, how easily he could have destroyed our hopes. All was suspended upon his will. War might have ravaged and desolated our fields. Insects, blasts, and mildew, were at his nod. The heavens over us might have been as brass, and the earth under us as iron, through continued and scorching heat. Excessive rains might have deluged the soil, injured the ripening of the corn, and hindered the ingathering.

Secondly, let us reflect how dreadful the effects of dearth would have proved. God has favoured us in a thousand instances. He has not only relieved, but indulged us. With how many sounds, and perfumes, and colours, and relishes, has he gratified our senses! But these might have been withholden without annihilating human support. We never feel in viewing a flower as we do at the sight of an ear of corn. It is when we lean on the stile and see the waving bounty, or when we walk through the pathway of the standing ears; it is then we exclaim, "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." It is not difficult to convince men of the importance of what relates to their bodies. The flesh cries out, and if denied ease or food will be heard. Animal appetites often return, and the relief of them is even essential to the preservation of life. What so powerful as the cravings of hunger? We have also relations to be provided for as well as ourselves. Many have families: some have large families. What is it for a mother to hear a child cry for want, and have no sustenance to give it!

Thirdly, we must not forget how much we have deserved his displeasure. We cannot estimate properly his goodness without considering our unworthiness of the least of all his mercies. Here there is a difference between us and other creatures. The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season. But they have never offended him, they have always fulfilled the end of their being. But we have renounced our allegiance to him, we have followed idols, we have joined in alliance with his foes, and have daily and hourly provoked him to his face—What claim has a rebel upon his gracious sovereign? or a runaway servant who has robbed him, upon a kind master? Where is the benefactor who would continue his bounties after numberless proofs of ingratitude, and enmity, and insult? Where then should we have been if God had rewarded us according to our iniquities? Our guilt has been aggravated beyond that of any other country, by reason of our pre-eminent advantages. Surely it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. Surely at the end of another harvest we are constrained to exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

But we are here reminded not only of the nature of his goodness, but the subjects of it: "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." It is not for them exclusively. "The king is served by the field." A supply for the poor is of course a supply for the rich; and it is easy to see that a suspension of the Divine goodness would involve all ranks. The rich can no more create than the poor; and should the course of vegetation be stopped by him who has power to destroy as well as to produce, what profit would a man have of all the wealth he possessed? Wealth would be nothing if it could not be laid out; and if the time ever came, which the Lord forbid! in which there was neither earing nor harvest, the proprietor, as well as the peasant and the pauper, would perish. But it is spoken in reference to the poor, because,

First, they are the larger mass of mankind, and whatever pride may think, in the eye of reason, policy, and revelation, by far the most important, useful, and necessary part.

Secondly, they would be more peculiarly affected by deficiency. Dear purchases can be made by the rich, who, as the price of provisions advances, can follow it; but the poor are speedily straitened, and become a prey to scarceness; and every door is shut against them but that of precarious charity.

Thirdly, to encourage those in humble and trying life to depend upon him. What he did formerly he does now. He prepares of his goodness for the poor. He may try you, and require proof of your confidence, before he communicates relief: but "the needy shall not always be forgotten, the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever." "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land,

and verily thou shalt be fed." And "a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked."

Fourthly, to enforce our attention to them, from the Divine example. We see how he had his eye upon the poor in the Jewish economy. It is delightful to read the various provisions concerning them in the law of Moses. All the earth spontaneously yielded, the seventh year, belonged to the poor. At harvest the owners were not to cut down the corners of their fields, they were to scatter some handfuls behind them for the gleaner, and if they dropped a sheaf they were not to go back for it. See what is said with regard to their borrowing, and pledges: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious." Again: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry." Hear James calling men away from the gold ring and gay clothing: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats?" And, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." We inveigh not against the distinctions and ranks of life; yea, we would maintain them, and are persuaded the invasions of them are no more advantageous to inferiors than to their superiors. Yet they may be carried to an extreme. Neither would we wish to relax for one moment the apostolic law, that "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat." It was never the design of Providence, that the poor should be fed without labour; but if they are willing to labour, and cannot procure a decent and comfortable support for themselves, something must be wrong somewhere, in the state of the community; and rulers and subjects should remember the awful admonition: "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

Every season shows his goodness on behalf of the poor. Let us be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful; and followers of God as dear children. "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." What a responsibility attaches to the affluent! What a disgrace, what a curse will their abundance be without diffusion! "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Let us thus fall in with the designs of God, in befriending the necessitous. The poor we have always with us, and their distresses are great. Let us feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and cheer those who are ready to perish, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy: and be so many little images of him who prepares of his goodness for the poor. It will be one of the best ways in which we can show our gratitude on the present occasion—But let us sing a song of praise to the Author of all good, in the language of David, so beautifully versified by Watts—

"Good is the Lord, the heavenly King,
Who makes the earth his care,
Visits the pastures every spring,
And bids the grass appear.

"The clouds, like rivers rais'd on high,
Pour out, at thy command,
Their watery blessings from the sky,
To cheer the thirsty land.

"The soften'd ridges of the field
Permit the corn to spring;
The valleys rich provision yield,
And the poor labourers sing.

"The little hills on every side
Rejoice at falling showers;
The meadows, dress'd in all their pride,
Perfume the air with flowers.

"The barren clods, refresh'd with rain,
Promise a joyful crop;
The parched grounds look green again,
And raise the reaper's hope.

'The various months thy goodness crowns,
How bounteous are thy ways!
The bleating flocks spread o'er the downs,
And shepherds shout thy praise."

SEPTEMBER 23.

"*And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.*"
Isaiah xxv. 6.

We might remark here the author of the entertainment; and the place where it was to be made; and the richness of the provision: but let us notice only the universality of the design. When men make a feast, they invite only their relations and friends, or their rich neighbours, who can bid them again, and make a recompense. But there is one feast

to which are invited the occupiers of the highways and hedges, and the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Belshazzar the king made a great feast; but it was to "a thousand of his lords." Ahasuerus made a great feast; but it was "unto all his princes and servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and rulers of the provinces being before him." It is true, that at the close of it "the king made a feast unto all the people that were found in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace." But how large soever the court of the garden was, it could contain only a few thousand partakers, while millions in his one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, were excluded from the festivity. But in this mountain the Lord makes "unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

That he was able to do this, shows his greatness and all-sufficiency. That he is willing to do this shows the exceeding riches of his mercy and grace. It serves to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. The provisions of the latter were chiefly confined to one people, and comparatively a very small nation: but here there is no difference between Jew or Greek. Jesus is the Saviour of the world: in his name shall the Gentiles trust; in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

It displays the unchristianism of monopoly. It is lamentable to think how fond some are of inclusion, and still more, if possible, of exclusion. If God was to sanction the anathemas of his rash and erring creatures, how few would be saved! But if, though they should call upon him as long and as loud as the worshippers called upon Baal, he will not hear them. And if they were fairly to consult his word, his word would tell them that they know not what manner of spirit they are of. If they were in a good frame of mind, though they would not wish to sacrifice truth to candour, they would rejoice in the thought that others, *all* others are invited as well as themselves, and that for all there is enough, and to spare.

This universality should also check despondency. "I feel my need of these blessings, more than of my necessary food, and long, above all things, to partake of them. And O my soul, what hinders me? If the feast be made for all, why may not I come, and partake freely? The inviters were ordered to bid as many as they should find, both bad and good, to the marriage. It would therefore be, not humility, but even disobedience, to refuse the command of the king. And this is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."

Here too, is the annihilation of excuse. You will be able hereafter to plead no peculiarity in your circumstances as a reason for your irreligion. You will see persons at the right hand, of the same country, connexions, calling, condition; and of the same nature, weakness, passions, and depravity too, with yourselves. Truth will not allow you to say, I perished because there was no Saviour able or ready to save me; because no redress adequate to my relief was proposed to my hope, and placed within my reach. I sought deliverance, but could not obtain it. He turned away my prayer, and said, You are an exception—the benefit was free for all—but you. No. You will have no cloak for your sin. No alleviation of your misery. This will be the hell of hell—You would not come to him that you might have life. You were soul-suicides. *You* destroyed *yourselves.*

SEPTEMBER 24.

"*Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*"—John vi. 45.

Many perhaps have never particularly observed this expression. But it is very instructive.

It shows us what faith is—It consists in coming to Christ. He is no more in the world, so as to be known after the flesh. The coming to him could not mean a corporeal approach, without excluding all now living, and all who have lived ever since, from the promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Yea, when he was on earth, this coming intended much more than a bodily access to him, for he complained of those who were then near him and followed him, "ye will not come to me that ye might have life;" "ye also have seen me and believed not." But it is a representation of faith by its operation and effect. Faith is not a mere notion or belief, but *such* a belief as is accompanied with an application to him for all the purposes of salvation—Therefore coming to him, and believing on him, are used by himself as synonymous with each other.

It reminds us also of the reasonableness of faith. Faith is not the offspring of presumption or ignorance: it flows from instruction, from divine teaching—"Every one, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." A fool only would intrust something immensely valuable to a being with whom he was unacquainted. I have ventured, says the Christian, such an interesting, such an infinite treasure in the hands of Christ, that I should be the most miserable of all creatures had I any suspicion concerning him. "I *know* whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that

day." And every believer is able to give a reason of the hope that is in him. His house is great and weighty, and the fall would involve not only the furniture, but himself; and many a rain and many a flood will arise, and be sure to try it; but he feels secure, because he is conscious that it is founded on a rock. It is therefore said, "they that know thy Name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."

We see also the entire importance of the Lord Jesus. We cannot infer the value of a thing from the aim of men; they may attach themselves to a trifle, and expend their labour and sacrifices on a thing of naught. But the Lord is a God of knowledge; by him actions are weighed. And if God fixes upon an end, and always keeps it in view; and if, in all he says and does, he seeks the promotion of it, we may be assured that the object is unspeakably excellent and necessary. Now we here see that all the teaching of God, both in the revelation of the word and in the work of his Spirit, is designed to make us feel our need of Christ; and to induce us to desire him, and to repair to him. This is telling us plainly enough, that

> "None but Jesus
> Can do helpless sinners good."

That there is salvation in none other; that in him all fullness dwells; that he is all, and in all.

Here is a rule for ministers to go by. If they would conform to the mind and method of God himself—and none teaches like him—every one that hears and learns of them will be guided to Christ, and will hear nothing but the call, "Behold the Lamb of God." This is not the case with all preachers. If we were to hear and learn of some, they would lead us far enough from him; we should be conducted to Epictetus, or Moses, or referred to our poor and wretched selves for righteousness and strength, instead of being left looking only unto Jesus, and crying, Lord, save, or I perish.

Finally, here is a test by which we may judge of our spiritual state. If we are a people of no understanding, he that made us will not have mercy on us, and he that formed us will show us no favour. Am I then taught of God? Have I heard and learned of the Father? How shall I answer this question, so essential to my peace and comfort? *How do I stand with regard to Christ?* Have I forsaken the world, and do my thoughts and desires reach out after him? Is it the prevailing concern of my heart to win Christ? to be found in him? to know the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death? Am I coming to him as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious? This, this is the test—Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto him; and every one that cometh unto him hath heard and learned of the Father.

SEPTEMBER 25.

"*And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.*"—Matt. xiv. 12.

While you sympathize with them in their loss, and applaud their conduct on the occasion, you are perhaps ready to envy them the privilege they enjoyed. "Ah! happy disciples, to be able to repair to Jesus, and tell *him* your grief!" But *you* may do the same. He has said, Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. And therefore though he is no longer on earth corporeally, he is here spiritually. Though you cannot see him, you can approach him, and find him a very present help in trouble. Yea, you have the advantage of those who lived in the days of his flesh. He was not then in every place, but,

> "Where'er we seek him he is found,
> And every place is holy ground."

They often had to go to a distance. Martha and Mary had to call in a servant, and send to him beyond Jordan, saying, "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick." But you can instantly fall upon your knees, and cry, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me;" and prayer will reach him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—"Before they call I will answer, and while they call I will hear."

Realize therefore the privilege; and remember that the best thing you can do with your trouble is to take it to him. This is sanctioned by the highest authority: "Is any afflicted? Let him pray."

It is recommended by experience:

> "What various hindrances we meet
> In coming to a mercy-seat:
> Yet who that knows the worth of prayer,
> But wishes to be often there?"

Of all the millions that have tried it, there is not one but will say, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God:" and also add, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen *thine* heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

There is nothing like the influence of the exercise, in calming the ruffled mind, healing the broken spirit, and preserving us from all the unhallowed feelings to which we are liable in the hour of distress.

To whom can we be so encouraged to go as unto him? Others are often wanting in kindness. Their patience is soon exhausted. By our continual coming we weary them. They may be in a selfish or pettish frame. They may be too busy to attend to our complaint. It may be deemed beneath their notice when they deign to regard us—What airs they give themselves—what difficulties

they urge—what delays they require—how they love to make us feel our dependence—and how sure are they to remind us of our faults! But he upbraideth not. He despises not the prayer of the destitute. He is full of condescension and long-suffering. His heart is the dwelling-place of pity. He presses us to make free with him—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

If men were kind, they are often powerless. If their ear is open to hear, their hand is shortened that it cannot save. They may weep when we weep, and weep most of all that their resources cannot aid their affections. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. As to the trouble you take to him, he can explain it, and show you wherefore he contendeth with you. He can support you under it. He can deliver you from it. He can turn it into a blessing. He can enable you to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Therefore go and tell Jesus. It is not in all cases and in all respects improper to unbosom yourselves to a fellow-creature, and especially a fellow-Christian; some solace and relief may be obtained: but, says Cowper—

> "Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
> To heaven in supplication sent;
> The cheerful cry would oft'ner be,
> 'Hear what the Lord hath done for me.'"

Have you, like these disciples, been to the grave, and left your hope and comfort in the dust? Go and tell him who wept himself at the grave of Lazarus, and who can be better to you than ten sons.

Have you received intelligence that alarms or distresses you? Do as Hezekiah did—He went and spread the letter before the Lord.

Have you a heart's bitterness, known only to yourself, and which you feel not at liberty to divulge to any earthly connexion? There is nothing but you may communicate to him. He enjoins you in *every* thing to make known your requests unto him.

Are you a backslider, and after knowing the evil of sin, and tasting that the Lord is gracious, have you turned again to folly? Have you said, I have loved idols, and after them will I go? "Oh! turn; turn again." "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord." You will find him where, and what he was—the change has been only in you—

> "Behold, great God, we come to thee,
> Though blushes veil our face;
> Constrain'd our last retreat to seek
> In thy much injur'd grace."

And O thou sinner, just awakened to look into thy condition; and pressed with a sense of thy guilt, and depravity, and danger, art asking, "What must I do?" Go thou to him. Wait for nothing to recommend thee—He looks for nothing. Throw thyself at his footstool. Say, "Lord, mine is a pressing case; I must obtain relief, or be undone for ever. Other refuge have I none. In thee is my help—Leave not my soul destitute." And he will not, he cannot reject thee; for he has said—HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME, I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.

SEPTEMBER 26.

"*He hath given all things into his hand.*" John iii. 35.

LOVE is always generous. It delights to heap favours upon its object; and never thinks it has done enough. But what munificence is here! "The Father loveth the Son, and HATH GIVEN ALL THINGS INTO HIS HAND!"

How far does this universality reach? If we compare the assertion with other passages of Scripture, especially with the words of our Saviour after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" and with the words of Paul, "He ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things:" we shall see that it cannot be taken too extensively.

It takes in all in nature. To him, as we learn from the application of the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, David refers when he says, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." Accordingly in the days of his flesh all creatures confessed and obeyed his power. He made summer and winter. The day is his, the night also is his. The silver and the gold are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. The world is his, and the fullness thereof—He is unworthy the name of a Christian who does not acknowledge his rights and agency in all the scenes of creation around him; walk with him in the bounties of the field; and the beauties of the garden; see him in the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys; and hear him in the voice of every bird, and the breeze of every wind.

It takes in all in Providence. All that is devised and carried on in our world is under his rule. The government is upon his shoulder. There is not a being to be found but is either his servant or his slave; who does not obey him voluntarily or by constraint. He doth according to his own will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand. He changes the times and the seasons. He removeth and setteth up kings. While they deal proudly, he is above them. While they follow their own passions they fulfil his designs. When they move in the line of his purpose they are resistless; and when they turn from it, and attempt to go forward, he has a hook for their nose, and a bridle for

their jaws. The wrath of man praises him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains—like the owner of the mill, who admits the water as long as the grinding requires, and then drops the hatch. In all our temporal concerns he decides our successes or disappointments.

"If light attends the course I run,
'Tis he provides the rays;
And 'tis his hand that veils my sun,
When darkness clouds my days."

Sickness and health, the changes of life, the time, place, and manner of our death, are all regulated by him who "careth for us."

It includes all in grace. The resources of the natural and providential worlds are his, to enable him to accomplish the work of grace. He could not make all things work together for the good of his people, unless they were put under him, and subjected to his control. But they are. He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. He is made head over all things to the Church. Hence all his ways towards them are mercy and truth. He is also king in Zion. Every thing there is committed to his authority. He is the only Lord of conscience. He has the appointment of his own ordinances. He has given prophets, apostles, pastors, evangelists, teachers. All the influences of the Spirit are dispensed by him, and from him. Pardon and peace, righteousness and strength are in him—in him all fullness dwells. Therefore to him shall men come: to him shall the gathering of the people be.

It includes all in glory. At death he comes and receives the souls of his people to himself, that where he is there they may be also. At the last day he raises their bodies, confesses them before his Father and the holy angels, and ushers them into the joy of their Lord. That better world he viewed as his own, even here, and disposed of every thing in it as the owner and governor. "I appoint unto you," said he to his disciples, "a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed me." "This day," said he to the dying thief, "thou shalt be with me in Paradise." The righteous Judge, says the Apostle, shall give me the crown of righteousness: and all the rewards bestowed upon the churches in Asia were conferred by him—"The Father hath given all things into his hand."

Therefore let his adversaries tremble. They may make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. Escape is impossible. Resistance is vain—but submission is not.

And therefore if the Father has given all things into his hand, let us do the same. He is worthy of the surrender, and our interest requires it. Let us give ourselves into his hand; and let us do this three ways or for three purposes—First, to be saved. Secondly, to be employed. And Thirdly, to be governed by him.

Then we may be joyful in him; and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, exulting in the thought that he who is infinitely dear to us is so exalted, and that he on whom we entirely depend is so mighty. Then we shall have nothing to fear, but every thing to expect. Our welfare is involved in his advancement: and because he lives we shall live also. We are the followers, the friends, the children, the bride, the members of him who is higher than the highest—He is Lord of all.

SEPTEMBER 27.

"*We would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*"
—2 Cor. v. 4.

Here we see that it was not death they desired, but the result of it. They wished to resemble those who will be found alive at the last day, who will not sleep, but be changed: or to be privileged like Enoch and Elias, who went to heaven without dissolution, and were glorified soul and body together. They longed to be clothed, without being found naked—to be clothed upon—that this corruptible might put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality—that their mortality, instead of being lodged in the grave and devoured of worms, might be swallowed up of life, as the rivulet is swallowed up of the river, and the outline is swallowed up of the finished picture, and the dawn is swallowed up of the day, and the child of the man. That is, they wished, if it were possible and allowable, to reach their completeness gently and insensibly, without such a disruption and tearing to pieces as death. Three things may be remarked from hence.

First. The primitive Christians were not, as we sometimes imagine, peculiar beings, and strangers to many of our feelings. They were men of like passions with us, and encompassed with infirmities. They had nature in them as well as grace. They were holy, but human: spiritual, but not divine.

Secondly. A dislike of death is no proof of the want of religion. The forerunners and the accompaniments, "the pains, the groans, the dying strife," may sometimes deeply affect a pious mind. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. No creature can like its own dissolution. We see this in the animals; though they have no dread of futurity, they yet struggle for life. The fear of death is as naturally inherent in us as hunger, thirst, and sleep; and only requires to be governed. Adam had it in the state of innocency, otherwise the words, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," would have been no threatening. Our Saviour, though his humanity was sin-

less, feared it, and prayed to him who was able to save him from death, with strong cryings and tears, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. We may covet a thing, and not like the mode in which it is to be obtained. The husband and the father longs to see and embrace his family on the American shore, yet shrinks back at the thought of the Atlantic which he has to cross. A man is confined with a diseased member, and his recovery depends upon the removal of it; now what he longs for is not the amputation, but the cure; and no one questions whether he wishes to be well because he shudders at the operation.

Yet, thirdly, since dying is the way, and the only way, to life everlasting, we should endeavour to rise as much as possible above the dread of it. And faith can accomplish what is impossible to flesh and blood. Let us view the subject under all the softenings given it in the Scripture. Let us remember that Jesus has taken away the sting of death, though the stroke remains; and that the stroke itself will not only be harmless, but beneficial, infinitely beneficial—To die is gain. Keep your eye not on what lies immediately before you, but on the glory and blessedness beyond. If the passage be trying, it opens into a wealthy place—and it is short—and safe—and you will not be alone in it. He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Therefore thank God, and take courage, and sing—

"While he affords *his* aid,
I cannot yield to fear;
Though I should walk through death's dark shade,
My Shepherd 's with me *there*."

SEPTEMBER 28.

"*To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and* PRECIOUS."—1 Peter ii. 4.

EVERY attentive observer must be led to acknowledge the truth of Isaiah's words concerning the Messiah, "He is despised and rejected of men." When we look around us, we find the multitude rising early, and sitting up late, and eating the bread of sorrow, but not seeking after Jesus. Rejoicing in the work of their own hands, but not glorying in the Lord. This is a fact peculiarly painful to Christians, who, ever since the eyes of their understanding were opened, have been praying, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." But let them remember that he is not universally undervalued. There are some who know his name; yea, they have many and distinguished associates in their estimation of him.

They can claim God the judge of all—To him he is precious. "This is my beloved Son," says he, "in whom I am well pleased." "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighted." Do we need proof of this? "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands." He forgives us "for Christ's sake;" and assures us that whatsoever we ask "in his name" we shall receive.

They can claim the innumerable company of angels. Though these glorious beings have not been redeemed by him, they know that he is their Maker and Preserver; and they know that he is the Saviour of their younger brethren. He was seen of angels as his attendants and admirers in the days of his flesh. They rejoice, because it is an accession to his subjects, over every sinner that repenteth. The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, are the things into which they desire to look. And what is the burden of their songs? "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

They claim all the partakers of Divine grace. In whatever age and country they live; and whatever distinctions prevail among them, there is no difference here. Here they are of one heart and of one soul—For to them that believe he is precious.

In what degree! This neither the tongue of men or of angels can express. But two things we may affirm. He is *universally* precious. There are some who may be termed Christ-dividers. They would be made the partakers of Christ, but partially. They like his cross but not his sceptre; his sacrifice but not his service. But a real believer, when he, so to speak, examines Christ all over, acquiesces and delights in the whole of him. He is precious, says he, in his person, precious in his characters, precious in his relations, precious in his offices, precious in his life, precious in his death, precious in his doctrine, precious in his promises, precious in his commands—"Yea, he is *altogether* lovely." And he is *supremely* precious. Indeed we do not love him sincerely, unless we love him above all. No other regard becomes his claims. He is the king and the husband of his church; and majesty and marriage allow of no competition of right, or rivalry of attachment. Children are dear, health is dear, life is dear; but they are not to be compared with him. There is no one whose authority sways like his; there is no one whose frown I dread, or whose presence I long for like his. Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee—

"All my capacious powers can wish,
In thee most richly meet;
Nor to mine eyes is light so dear
Nor friendship half so sweet."

SEPTEMBER 29.

"*Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.*"—Isaiah xvi. 4.

The Assyrians were going to invade Judea; in consequence of which some of the people would flee for shelter to Moab, a neighbouring country. In the words we have read, God bespeaks protection on their behalf during their exile; and intimates that their distress would be only short, owing to the destruction of the destroyer. There are several things here noticeable and instructive.

We see that Israelites may be "outcasts." They are not outcasts from God, for he does not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Fear may indeed lead them to say, "I am cast out of his sight;" and to ask, "will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more?" But this is their infirmity. What says the promise? "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." But they may be outcasts with regard to others. Outcasts by national distress; for in this respect all things come alike to all. Thus it was with the good Shunamite, whose son had been restored to life: Elijah said, "Arise, and go, thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." So in the time of the Judges the same calamity prevailed; and "a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons." The want of employment also, as well as of provision, may compel to such a step. We have no pity on idlers: they that will not work should not eat: but it is hard to be willing to work, and be able to get nothing to do. A native country is dear, and a trifling cause will not, and *should* not induce us to leave it. Duty says, "Dwell in the land" as long as hope says, "Verily, thou shalt be fed:" but necessity has no law. Outcasts by the violence of persecution. Thus when the poor man, born blind, confessed the Saviour, and recommended his Benefactor, the Pharisees, it is said, "cast him out;" they drove him from the assembly and excommunicated him. At the time of Stephen's death "there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles." But these, though spared for the time, were also soon dispersed. How many outcasts were there from France upon the infamous revocation of the edict of Nantz! And how many, before the rights of conscience were acknowledged, left this country, and fled to America, carrying liberty and religion with them! And though now persecution is entirely unsanctioned not only by our constitution, but government, and no man can be made legally afraid, even when he calls his neighbour under his vine and under his figtree, yet hardships are still endured by individuals from the carnal mind, that is enmity against God: and we have known wives that have been abandoned; children that have been disinherited; tradesmen that have been deserted; servants, mechanics, and tenants, that have been dismissed from their places, employment, and farms, because they adhered to their religious convictions. Outcasts by reproach. Where the person is not injured, and individuals are not deprived of their liberty or substance, the name may be cast out as an evil. They may be viewed as hypocrites, as enthusiasts, as deranged, as melancholy, and be excluded from parties and circles as unworthy of their company, and fit only for scorn or pity. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy." For he that gathereth the outcasts of Israel—

Is not ashamed to own them as *his*—"*My* outcasts." Instead of despising them, he is the more ready to confess them when they suffer for his sake, or peculiarly need his favour. And though they may be poor, afflicted, and contemned, yet under every outward disadvantage they are more excellent than their neighbours, and he deems them his peculiar treasure. "When there were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; he suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." When they were brickmakers in Egypt, he "gave Egypt for their ransom." When they were captives in Babylon, he gave "Ethiopia and Seba for them." "Since," says he, "thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." But read the language of the Apostle. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" —Yet adds he, "Of whom the world was not worthy."

He can raise up for them friends even among strangers and enemies. The Moabites were old, and had been often very cruel foes to Israel—yet says God, "Let mine outcasts

dwell with thee, Moab; and be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler." The people of the world ought to be kind to the people of God, for they owe much to them; they derive many exemptions and many advantages from their influence and prayers. But the world knoweth them not; and from their principles and dispositions we could look only for hatred and opposition. And yet, "the earth helped the woman." The servants of God have often been succoured by persons as unlikely to serve them, as the ravens were to bring Elijah food in the morning and in the evening. When you wish to carry a measure with your fellow-creatures, put the case into the hands of the Lord of all. Never limit his power or his goodness. He has not only all events, but all hearts under his control; and he turneth them like rivers of water. The grand thing is to approve ourselves unto him: for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh also his enemies to be at peace with him. This Jacob found, after prayer, in meeting Esau. Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven, and the heathen monarch was induced to favour his wish on behalf of his country. And at the three annual festivals of the Jews, when all the males were drawn to Jerusalem, and invasion seemed easy and inviting, he suffered none of the surrounding nations even to *desire* their border.

Finally, It is not long the Lord's sufferers will need assistance or protection. This was the case here; and we know how it was accomplished. The danger was great; the enemy had taken all the strong holds of Judah, and had encamped against Jerusalem itself. But there he was arrested and destroyed. This God foresaw, for he had purposed and promised it; and therefore he speaks of it as done already: "For the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." The same may be said of all those that distress or alarm the Christian. He may be delivered from many of his difficulties and afflictions before death. But it is only during life he can want or suffer. How short therefore the season of trial! And much of this is gone already. Every day and hour your salvation is nearer than when you believed. A few more sighs, and all sorrow and sighing shall cease. A few more tears, and all tears shall be wiped from your eyes. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; a morning obscured by no cloud, and followed by no night. Yea, faith in the sure word of promise, realizing not only the nearness, but the certainty, considers the salvation as accomplished—"It is done." "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

SEPTEMBER 30.

"*Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.*"—Hebrews xii. 1.

—We should be encouraged to go on in our Christian course, or, as the Apostle expresses it, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Let us notice the fact, and see how it bears as an argument. Some suppose that Paul here refers to spectators, rather than examples. Persons in running a race had many gazing on them, and the presence of the lookers-on, as well as the prize itself, served to animate them. From hence, if successless, they were mortified as well as disappointed; if crowned, they were not only rewarded but applauded. It is a solemn truth, that we are never unseen in religion; many eyes are upon us: and we should pray to be led in a plain path, because, as the margin reads it, of our observers. The world and the church, our fellow Christians and our ministers, behold us; we are a spectacle to angels as well as to men; we are seen by the Judge of all. But though this be a truth, we are persuaded the Apostle alludes not to spectators, but examples. He refers to the characters he had recorded in the preceding chapter, commencing with pious Abel, and reaching down to the close of the Maccabean period of the Commonwealth of Israel.

These he says, "encompass us about." Their bodies were long ago laid in the grave, while their spirits returned to God who gave them; and in this state it is commonly, perhaps justly, supposed that they have no intercourse with the affairs of this lower world; Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledges us not. But, rescued from oblivion, their names, words, and deeds are found in the Scriptures; and by perusing these writings, we bring them around us from every quarter; they strike us in every direction. We seem to see them looking anxiously on us, and seem to hear them saying, "We were once in the same state with you, and you will soon be in the same glory with us. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

He remarks their number—"a cloud," "a great cloud of witnesses." They were few compared with their contemporaries of the same age; but collectively considered, they were a multitude which no man could number. In the most degenerate period, the Lord had a people for his Name; and they often exceeded the estimation of hope. When Elijah supposed he was the only true worshipper in the land, the Lord had reserved unto himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal,

and whose lips had not kissed him. But if the aggregate was great when Paul wrote this Epistle, what has it become since? And what is it now! How many millions have been added, since, to the general assembly and church of the first-born!—In whose fellowship we reckon up not a few of our own connexions, with whom we have taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company!

He gives this number a name—They are a great cloud of "witnesses"—This name God gives to all his people: "ye are my witnesses." According to the Apostle, these glorified beings *testified* to the nature of faith, and proved it to be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." They testified to the truth and the cause of God; and they testified by their lips and lives, and especially by their sufferings. They attested from experience, that religion was a practicable thing, for they exemplified it, though they had been men of the same nature, passions, and infirmities with others. They showed also from their own experience, that religion was not an unprofitable thing; they never served him in vain; but were always more than indemnified for every sacrifice they made. They all found it good to draw near to God. He was always better to them than their fears. He not only delivered, but indulged them. They were troubled on every side, yet not distressed. They trod on briers and thorns, but their shoes were iron and brass. They had arduous services and trials, but as their days so was their strength. They always complained of themselves, but never of their Lord and Saviour—They spake well of his name, and have left this confirmed, this inviting testimony behind them, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

OCTOBER 1.

"*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.*"—Psalm xvii. 15.

This is the language of a man whose mind is made up; who has decided for himself; who does not suspend his conduct upon the resolution of others. "This is my choice, my hope, my relief, my comfort. If the whole world should go another way, this is mine. I would draw others, I would draw all into the same course, for I know the blessedness of it—But I dare not be governed by them—As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

It is the language of a man rising in life; and with great prospects before him. From a mere shepherd, he had become a hero and a conqueror; he had married into the royal family, and knew he was to fill the throne of Israel. All this he overlooks, like a true son of Abraham, who "by faith sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. The sun conceals the stars, not by a diffusion of darkness, but of superior splendour. To one who has looked within the veil, and seen the glory that shall be revealed, what are all earthly honours, riches, and dominion. "Men of the world have their portion in this life—as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

It is the language of a Jew. Though the Jews lived under a dispensation abounding with carnal ordinances, some of them were far from being carnal men. Many of the promises addressed to them regarded the life that now is, and they had an obscurer revelation of a future state than we. Our Saviour tells his disciples that many prophets and kings had desired to see the things which they saw, and did not see them; and Paul says, that life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But this is to be taken comparatively, and not absolutely. In Judah was God known: his name was great in Israel. Jacob said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;" but what salvation could he look for in death, unless a salvation beyond the grave? Moses "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." And David said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

The source from which he derived his prospect of blessedness was God, in whose presence there is fullness of joy. If we do not make him the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever, we may seek happiness, but we shall never find it. Had a capacity to make us happy been placed in any creature, we should have been necessarily attached to idolatry, by the very law of our being.

The *beholding of God's face* signifies two things. First, the enjoyment of his favour. In the Scripture, to seek his favour is to seek his face: and for God to make his face to shine upon us, is to be gracious unto us. Hence, says David, "There be many that say, Who will show me any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." What can equal the expression of his love? In his favour is life. Secondly, Intimate communion with him. David was so far reconciled to Absalom, as to allow of his return to Jerusalem; but he said, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom dwelt two full years

in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face." Angels are represented as "always beholding the face of our heavenly Father." And thus it is said of the glorified saints, "They shall serve him, and they shall see his face." That is, they shall enjoy the most perfect acquaintance and intimacy with him.

Of this beatifical vision we know very little, and very little can we know till the voice cries, "Come and see." But one thing we know—It is the way in which the blessedness will be realized; "I shall behold thy face *in righteousness*." Righteousness is not a casual or usual concomitant of the privilege, but an essential requisite to it. It is indispensable in two respects—as to merit or title—and as to meetness or preparation. The former is derived from the righteousness of another, in which Paul wished to be found, and which he calls the righteousness of God by faith; and which is for all and upon all them that believe. The latter is from a righteousness of our own; by which we mean, not that it is ours derivatively, but subjectively, being wrought *in* us by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The one is the righteousness of justification, the other the righteousness of sanctification: the one is a relative change, or the change of our state; the other a personal change, or the change of our nature. They are very distinguishable from each other, but they are always united, and they are equally necessary. A title to a thing is not a meetness for it: but the Apostle blesses God who had made them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. That can never make us happy which is not adapted to our disposition. We cannot even hope for an object unless we value it and desire it: but our wishes follow our convictions and our feelings. No one longs for the heaven of a Christian, but he who is renewed in the spirit of his mind; and he alone is capable of enjoying it—Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Therefore the decision is, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God: without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And the subjects of Divine grace do not feel this a hardship: *they* do not groan, What a sad thing it is that we cannot go to heaven unless we are sanctified! *they* love sanctification, and pray to be delivered from all their iniquities. Suppose a man had the promise of an estate, and was assured he should be put in possession of it as soon as ever he was recovered from sickness, would he, while suffering the effects of his vile and painful disease, say, How lamentable it is that I cannot be put into the enjoyment of my estate till I am well! He would feel that he could not enjoy it while the malady continued; and would long for his health, even for its own sake, if no inheritance followed the invaluable blessing itself.

OCTOBER 2.

"*And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*"—Luke iv. 21, 22.

This is all we have of his wonderful sermon at Nazareth. And who can fill up the outline! But while we want the matchlessness of his own exemplification, we have the text, and are able to discern something of the truth and force of the words in their bearing on him who spake as never man spake—"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

It is useless to inquire, because it is impossible to determine, whether this scripture was one of the appointed lessons for the day, or whether he chose it purposely for the occasion, or whether it was the first passage that presented itself to his eye when he unfolded the roll. The latter would seem probable; yet, were this to be conceded, we must remember that he did nothing casually; accidental circumstances subserved his pleasure and were parts of his plan. But he asserts his qualification for his work and the design of his office. His mission was all mercy. He came not to condemn the world, but to seek and to save that which was lost. The statement more than implies the fallen perishing condition of mankind. The truth of the humiliating fact is the dark ground on which alone the glory of the Gospel can be displayed to advantage. If we deny it, the Gospel has nothing to do with us, and we shall have little to do with the Gospel. But happy are they, however painful the conviction, who feel that they are in the state of wretchedness which the Gospel is intended to relieve. To them it will be *indeed* glad tidings. They will see that it is every way suitable to their woes and wants, and entirely adequate to their relief.

Draw near, and lay open your complaints. Are you "poor?" Envy not those who have an abundance of this world's goods. Let not your privations induce you to murmur or despair. You may be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. The poor have the Gospel preached unto them: and if you receive the message, it will bless your bread and your water; it will turn your humble dwelling into a heavenly palace; it will fill

you with all the fullness of God—"He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

Are you "broken-hearted?" pressed down, crushed with fear and sorrow, arising from a sense of sin and guilt? A wounded spirit who can bear? But he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up all their wounds. In other cases people are said to die of a broken heart; but here they will only die of a whole one. He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit—"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted."

Are you enslaved? There is no bondage like the bondage of corruption: no vassalage like the slavery of the soul under the dominion of sin, and when taken captive by the devil at his will. Have you felt the degradation and misery, and do you sigh for deliverance? Turn, ye prisoners of hope, to him who can make you free indeed—"He is sent "to preach deliverance to the captives."

Are you "blind" as well as bound? This was the case with Samson and Zedekiah; their oppressors having put out their eyes. We have known persons deprived of bodily sight who were able to see clearly the things of God: but multitudes who have corporeal vision are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. They see no beauty nor comeliness in him who is fairer than the children of men. But he can open the eyes of the understanding, and make us wise unto salvation—He is sent "for the recovering of sight to the blind."

Are you not only bound, and blind, but "bruised?" Here is no tautology or excess—every word adds to the picture. Joseph's "feet were hurt with fetters; he was laid in irons." The magistrates commanded Paul and Silas to be "beaten;" and they were not only cast into prison, but "had many stripes laid upon them." Who can describe the injuries and sufferings of sinners! But he "sets at liberty them that are bruised."

Or are you in the condition of any or of all those among the Jews who were compassionated by the Jubilee, which returned every fiftieth year; when silver trumpets proclaimed through the land, "ye servants, you are now free from your masters. Ye debtors, you are now discharged from your creditors. Ye forfeiters of your estates, you have now your inheritances restored?" How would such an announcement be longed for—how "acceptable" would such a season prove to all who were to be relieved and enriched! "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound"—He preaches "the acceptable year of the Lord." The whole continuance of this dispensation, however, is only *a year*—and each of you has only *a day* of it—"Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation."

What effect has this discourse upon the audience? They were struck with admiration. But it is feared with nothing else—"all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?" They seem not firmly to have believed his declarations, or seriously to have considered his doctrine, or to have received the love of the truth, that they might be saved. If they had convictions they were ineffectual ones; or if their feelings were excited they were overpowered by their vain and worldly prejudices and passions: and therefore they begin cavilling, not indeed at his teaching, but at the meanness of his extraction. "Have we not lately seen him labouring like one of us? Are we to bow to his authority?"

"Lord, what is man!" How are the best means and opportunities rendered useless! Is it strange if modern ministers should complain of the want of acceptance and success, when even he could say, "I have spent my strength in vain?"

Yet we sometimes hope, though outnumbered by a vile majority whose astonishment soon issued in malignity, a few admired from other and better principles, and were ready to lift up their voice and cry, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." So must it be with us, if we would not "wonder and perish." How glorious his person! How divine his condescension! How full of grace and truth! We must love him. We must confide in him. We must apply to him for every purpose he is appointed to accomplish. We must feel the tendency of every view we take of his character, changing us into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth are enough to relieve every perplexity, to banish every fear, to surpass every hope, and to fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory—But they cannot profit, unless they are mixed with faith in those that hear them.

OCTOBER 3.

"*Upholding all things by the word of his power.*" Heb. i. 3.

This is unquestionably spoken of the Lord Jesus. It shows us what is the nature and condition of creatures: they cannot subsist without support. They can no more of themselves continue in existence than they could give themselves life. In him they live, move, and have their being. "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." Preservation therefore is a divine work; and in a sense it is a continued creation. Yet he is equal to this; he does it; and observe—

The extent of his sustentation: he upholds

"all things." This takes in nothing less than our earth and the multitudes of beings attached to it. And what myriads of these are there! And the eyes of all wait upon him; and he openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Yet what is our earth compared with the immensity of space? And what is the aggregate of creatures adhering to this mole-hill globe to the inhabitants of *all* other regions in the universe? Yet all—every worm—and every world is from him, and by him all things consist.

And see the ease and efficiency of his agency: he upholdeth all things "by the word of his power." A man, however powerful, can do but little. A complication of concerns perplexes and bewilders him. The exertion of a few hours wearies and exhausts him. Impose upon him an increase of burden, and he founders and sinks. But "is anything too hard for the Lord?" "If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord." Rulers accomplish their wishes without moving: they can act by an order. The centurion was only an inferior officer, yet he could say to one of the soldiers under him, Go, and he went; to another, Come, and he came; and to his servant, Do this, and he did it. And he spake this in reference to the Lord Jesus with regard to a particular case, and to show his confidence in his powerfulness—that disorders come and go at his bidding. We read that "he sent his word and healed them," that is, he commanded the cure, and thereby produced it. "At my rebuke," says he, "I dry up the sea." "He rebuked," it is said, "the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm." With the same facility and majesty he made the world; "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "He said, Let there be light, and there was light." So will it be hereafter with all the millions of the dead; "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth." What difficulty, then, can lie in his way? Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. It is only for him to speak, and the heathens shall cast their idols to the moles and to the bats, and Mahometanism shall perish, and the Jew look upon him whom he has pierced, and mourn, and the man of sin be destroyed, and in the churches of the faithful, every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up—And "he that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make all things new."

And is this spoken of him who lay in the manger and died upon the cross? Can he then be any thing less than "the Lord of life and glory," "in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily?"

It is this that displays and magnifies his condescension. His greatness was unsearchable, but he made himself of no reputation. Widows ministered to him of their substance. "Ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich."

OCTOBER 4.

"*Is this thy kindness to thy friend?*"
2 Sam. xvi. 17.

This was the inquiry or complaint of Absalom, addressed to Hushai, because he went not with him. Let us transfer it to a nobler being, and apply it to a juster occasion.

Jesus sustains the character here expressed, towards all his people. He gives them numberless proofs of a friendship, the most sincere, efficient, faithful, durable, and disinterested: he is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." But they often act towards him in a manner very unbecoming the relation, and induce him to ask, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"

It will be allowed that we can never discharge the obligations we owe him. We must lie for ever under the burden; but the "burden is light." Nothing is more painful than to be obliged to an enemy; but we feel otherwise when favoured by a benefactor we much regard and esteem. If I could save myself; if I could renew, keep, and glorify myself, I would infinitely rather my Lord and Saviour accomplished it; as it would show his love for me, and his presence with me: and I should endlessly feel myself indebted to him, and say, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. But though we cannot discharge our obligations, we ought to be sensible of them, and evince that we are willing to make him suitable returns, and, like the woman in the Gospel, to do what we can. Here, alas! he is often disappointed. He cannot indeed be disappointed as to fact, because his understanding is infinite; but he can be disappointed as to right. Surely he has a right to expect a certain kind of conduct from those he has so indulged; and not meeting with it he has surely reason to complain—and he *does* complain. "What more," says he, speaking of the Jewish church, "could have been done for my vineyard, and I have not done it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" And speaking of the same people under the emblem of a fig-tree, "These three years," says he, "I come seeking fruit, and find none."

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should readily obey him. If ye love me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And as none of these commandments are unreasonable or unprofitable, and as they afford expressions of our

attachment to him, they ought not to be grievous. But have we never drawn back, or turned aside; or been partial, or reluctant in duty? Have we always asked, with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" or resolved with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?"

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should own him, speak well of his name, and recommend him to others. Have we sought his glory? Have we laboured to advance his cause in the world? Have we endeavoured to make him known and endeared in the circle of our own connexions? Have we not in some companies blushed to have found out what we profess to believe? Have we not been ashamed of him and of his words? He, though passed into the heavens, is not ashamed to call us brethren: and shall we deny him before men?

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should credit his word. We cannot offer a greater indignity to another than to disbelieve his declarations. The affront would be aggravated if he was a person remarkable for veracity, and we ourselves had always seen nothing in him but truth and faithfulness. But suppose he had added an oath, which ends all strife, to his promises? By disbelieving him *then*, we should charge him not only with falsehood but perjury. And is not this applicable to us? How should we tremble at the nature and consequences of unbelief! Ah! my Lord, I hear thee saying, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Yes; I have not only contradicted thee—I have not only given thee the lie—but made thee to forswear thyself! and I cry out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

As our friend he expects that we should lay aside formality and reserve—that we should treat him with freedom and openness—that we should feel it not a task but a pleasure to come to his house—that we should never be afraid of offending him by the largeness of our applications, or wearying him by the frequency of our importunities. For he has commanded us to come boldly to the throne of grace; in every thing to make known our requests; to open our mouths wide; to ask and receive, that our joy may be full. But though we are not straitened in him, how straitened are we in ourselves! How cold, and distant, and suspicious, and fearful, often is our intercourse with him. How little do we honour him by our confidence!

As our friend he expects that we regard his connexions. "Is there any left of the house of Saul," said David, "that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Jesus has brethren and sisters on earth, who are afflicted and poor, and feel all the exigences of life. But we may ask, "Since they are so nearly related to him, why does he permit their want and distress?" It is partly for our sakes. He deputes them to live among us, to receive the tokens of our attachment to himself. We cannot sigh for opportunities to testify our regard, by saying, "Oh, if he were in the world again as he once was, how would I minister unto him; how would I open my doors and entertain him"—For he *is* in the world. The poor we have always with us. What we do unto one of the least of these his brethren, we do it unto him.

As our friend, if he has left us a memento to recall him to our minds, he expects that we should prize and observe it. Have we ever closed the eyes of a much-loved connexion, and have we in our possession a picture of him? How much do we value, and how often do we contemplate the inanimate shadow! But suppose the painting should represent him in the attitude of dying, and dying *for us*, while endeavouring to save us from fire, or water, or the stroke of the murderer—What is his own supper but such a likeness? Does it not show forth his death? Is he not before our eyes, evidently set forth crucified among us, and sacrificed for us? Do this, he said, in remembrance of me. And can we undervalue it? Can we neglect it? Neglect it constantly? Neglect it often? Is this thy kindness to thy friend?

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Let us not be unwilling to receive the rebuke. It is indeed humbling; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Let us learn to demean ourselves towards him in future more properly. Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn. Let us grieve that he is wounded in the house of his friends. Above all, let us grieve that we ourselves ever grieved his Holy Spirit. Indeed, if I am his, and in a proper state of mind, nothing will affect me like this—"I have acted an unworthy, an ungrateful part"—I have sinned against my best friend—

> "Sure were not I most vile and base,
> I could not thus my friend requite;
> And were not he the God of grace,
> He'd frown and spurn me from his sight."

OCTOBER 5.

"*Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.*" —Acts xii. 1, 2, 3.

PERSECUTION is a thing of which we happily know very little from experience. We are a sinful people, but blessed be God, persecution is not a national crime with us; vea,

it is even punishable; and conscientiousness is placed under legal protection. But while we rejoice in our privileges, and pray that God would preserve and prosper a country in which we sit under our own vine and fig-tree, and none can make us afraid; we do well to call to remembrance the former times, in which others endured a great fight of afflictions.—Four things are remarked concerning the persecution before us.

First, the season—"Now about *that* time"—What time? When, as we see from the conclusion of the preceding chapter, a great dearth prevailed throughout all the world, in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Every public calamity is a judgment for sin, and calls men to repentance: but it is dreadful when the design of Providence is frustrated, and men go on in their trespasses, and instead of returning to him that smiteth them, sin more and more against God. Yet so it was here. God's hand was lifted up, but they would not see: and while famine was stalking among them, and they had cleanness of teeth in all their borders, they are fighting against God, in the guilty and cruel business of persecution.

Secondly, the author—"Herod the king." Not the Herod under whom our Saviour was born: nor Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, who beheaded John: but Herod Agrippa, father of the king Agrippa whom Paul had almost persuaded to be a Christian. We know but little of him; and that little only shows his vileness. He reigned seven or eight years, and then departed disgracefully to meet a Being who will have a dreadful account to settle with tyrants and persecutors. Such wretches seldom die a timely and natural death. Here is the end of this child of the devil and enemy of all righteousness: "Upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Thirdly, the victims. Some of them are only adverted to—He stretched forth his hands to vex "certain of the Church:" and nothing more is said of them. We have the names of many of the sufferers for Christ, together with some of their dying words, and letters, and works, and which savour fragrantly of the prison; but a very large portion of the noble army of martyrs are unnoticed in the annals of history. They are indeed recorded in the book of life, and Jesus will confess them before his Father and the holy angels: but they were driven into exile, or pined away by disease in their dungeons, or were secretly dispatched, a spectacle to angels, but not to the world and to men. One of these victims however is here named. "He killed *James* the brother of John with the sword." James was a preacher. In the Church of God the post of honour has always been the post of danger: and he was the more likely to be laid hold of, as he was one of the two apostles called Boanerges, or sons of thunder, because they were rousing, bold, and fearless in their manner. He was also one of the two who wished to call for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, and would thus have been (Lord, what is man!) a persecutor himself: but "Jesus rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He was also one of the two sons of Zebedee, who persuaded their mother to desire a certain thing of our Lord: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." But Jesus answered, "Ye know not what ye ask: are ye able to drink of the cup I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them: Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with"—Looking forward in spirit at that very moment, and seeing John banished to the Isle of Patmos, and James beheaded of Herod!

Fourthly, the continuance—"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." And did it please the Jews? Then were they equally guilty. They who connive at the wickedness of others—who excite and encourage it, and feel a satisfaction in it, have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and are partakers of other men's sins—Yea, according to the Apostles, they are the most criminal "who take pleasure in them that do such things." The perpetrators may be strongly tempted, but the beholders can plead no such excuse; their delight shows congeniality with the wickedness itself.

But here we see how alive men are to the opinion and applause of their fellow-creatures. Even the great can inhale incense from the vulgar: and even the wise are not senseless to the flattery of fools. What enemies are men to men! How they influence and corrupt one another! Alone the individual feels well; and resolves; and abides by his resolution—till he gets into company. Alone he feels the evidence of truth—Why then does he not hear it, follow it, avow it? A frown, a sneer, a laugh, a name! Did Felix think the Apostle deserving imprisonment? No. "But willing to show the Jews a pleasure, he left Paul bound." Why did not many among the Pharisees believe on him whose miracles they could not deny? They *did* believe on him, but "feared to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of

God." Let us learn to act from principle; and dare to be singular if the course of duty demands it. Let this desire of approbation turn us towards God. Let us seek to please him. The attempt will involve us in no mean compliances; and it will be sure to succeed.

We also see how, in a bad course, men proceed from evil to evil, and wax worse and worse. One sin renders another necessary; or prepares the way for it, and renders it easier. Let us guard against beginnings. Let us crush the egg before it becomes a fiery flying serpent. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"—"He proceeded to take Peter also."

OCTOBER 6.

"*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.*"—Heb. xii. 1, 2.

THE language is allusive, and in the style of the Apostle, the comparison is familiar. As one of the games, celebrated with so much pomp among the Grecians, was running in a race, he often borrows an idea from it, to express in a measure the nature of the Christian life. It is a "race." It is needless to multiply articles of resemblance. It is easy to see the impression Paul would make: no prize without running: no heaven without diligence and zeal. Religion demands the full exertion of all our spiritual powers, and allows of no indolence, no repose. Whatever view we take of it, whether as it regards our principles or our conduct, what we have to abolish or establish, to avoid or to pursue; or whether as it includes the duties we owe to God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves;—it must appear a very active, laborious, and trying scene. It is a disgrace to the character of a Christian, and a contradiction to his profession, not only to turn aside or draw back, but to stand still, or look back, or even seem to come short. Advancement is not more obviously implied in the accomplishment of a race than progression is necessary in a course of godliness. We are therefore required to grow in grace. And Paul, exemplifying in his experience what he recommends in doctrine, says, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

This race is "set before us"—It is prescribed, marked out, made evident in the Scripture. It is not a concern into which we drop by chance; neither is it a course of our own devising. Religion is not will-worship, human inventions, the traditions and commandments of men. No authority is binding here but Divine. We have always one question only to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And he has in his word made things plain, in proportion as they are important, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein, and he may run that readeth. He has also set before us the difficulties attached to his course, so that if we suffer we have no reason to complain. If, when we meet with them, we are tempted to despond or decline, we may say, O my soul, ought I to be surprised? Am I deceived? When I gave in my unworthy name to become his follower, did he hide any thing from me? Did he not assure me that in the world I should have tribulation? Did he not say, If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me?

This race set before us is to be "run with patience." We shall constantly need this grace. We shall meet with provocations and injuries; and we are not to revenge ourselves, or even render railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. We shall suffer afflictions of various kinds and degrees; and we are not to murmur and repine, but in patience to possess ourselves, and to pray for all long-suffering with joyfulness. We may be exercised with delays; and these will often be peculiarly trying, for hope deferred maketh the heart sick. God hides his face. Prayer seems unnoticed. The promise appears gone for evermore. We have little success in our spiritual warfare. Iniquities prevail against us in the sense of their guilt and the feeling of their power. The way is long. Heaven looks at an awful distance, and seems to advance from us as we advance. Without are fightings, and within are fears—But we must persevere, and "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." It is not the first, but the last step in the race that brings the candidate to the goal. He only that endureth to the end shall be saved.

This race set before us we are thus to run with patience, "looking unto Jesus." The Apostle had mentioned a great cloud of witnesses before as exciting and encouraging us by their example: but he now passes from the saints to the Saviour; from the servants to the Master; from the witnesses of faith to "the author and finisher of faith." He himself had an appointed course; he had difficulties to overcome, and much to endure: but he was not impeded or dismayed—"For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." That the Apostle *immediately* refers to him as our example is obvious not only from the foregoing words, and the words I have just recited, but from the application following: "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds"—So Watts—

"Our glorious Leader claims our praise,
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to heaven."

But does this exclude any other reference? Are we to regard him as an example only? We cannot indeed be Christians without resembling him. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." And every Christian loves his example, and prays to be like-minded with him. Yet what is the true exigency of our case? We are guilty—Where is the sacrifice that puts away sin? "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." We want righteousness and strength—Where are we to find them? "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." How are we to be able to trace his dear steps as he goes before us in duty and suffering? "Without me," says he, "ye can do nothing:" but "my grace is sufficient for thee." We must therefore run, looking unto Jesus as delivered for our offences, as raised again for our justification, as one who ever lives to make intercession for us, as one in whom all fullness dwells, and from whose fullness we are to receive grace for grace. To him we are to look in every period, in every relation, in every engagement, in every trouble, in every danger, while we live—To him we are to look as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death—And then we are to go and behold him in the midst of the throne, where he attracts every eye, fills every heart, and employs every tongue.

OCTOBER 7.

"*And prayed unto him.*"—2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.

Few individuals ever surpassed Manasseh in depravity and wickedness. Yet he, even he, obtained mercy. And we here see the means employed for his conversion. Divine Providence so ordered things, that the enemy invaded Judah, and succeeded: "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon." *There* thus despoiled, degraded, and distressed; *there* the seeds of truth early sown in his mind began to revive; *there* the prayers of a pious father began to be answered—"and prayed unto him."

Affliction alone never converted one soul. We have known fools who have been brayed in a mortar, yet has not their folly gone from them. Ice may be broken and not dissolved: rock may be broken, and the fractions retain the same hardness as before. Yet there is a natural suitableness in affliction to produce the effect. It shows what an evil and bitter thing sin is, as the procuring cause of all our sufferings. It cuts the man off from present temptation; and affords him time and leisure for reflection; and the want of thought is the greatest obstacle to religion: hence the Scripture says, "Consider your ways:" and hence David acknowledges, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." It shows the vanity of the world, and affords opportunity to introduce the proposal of a better portion; and to urge the resolution, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation." It befriends confession and prayer; therefore says God, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." The bemoaning and repenting Ephraim had been chastised. The famine made the Prodigal think of heaven, and resolve to throw himself upon his Father's mercy.

Here is therefore a very instructive fact. It teaches us that prosperity is no proof of Divine favour; and that adversity is not incompatible with the love of God, but may even flow from it. We congratulate our friends on their successes and risings in the world; but frequently if we could see all, we should rather bewail them; for we should see their table becoming a snare, and their prosperity destroying them. On the other hand, we go and mourn with them over their losses and trials, when, if we could look forward, we should rather rejoice and be thankful; for we should see the valley of Achor given them for a door of hope; the ploughshare breaking up the fallow ground to prepare it for the seed of the kingdom; the way hedged up with thorns to keep the traveller from going astray. How should we have pitied Manasseh, had we seen him reduced from all his greatness, and thus indignantly and cruelly treated! But he soon acknowledged, with his pious ancestor, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted;" and he is now blessing God, not for his crown, but for his fetters—not for his palace, but for his dungeon—"This man was born there."

Let us always look hopefully towards the afflicted. While the physician yet administers medicine, we do not deem the case absolutely hopeless: while the husbandman prunes the tree, and digs about it, and manures it, we conclude he has not yet said to the feller, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

O what fools are we to look shy upon our troubles, and be afraid of our trials, instead of viewing them as some of the means of grace which God has ordained to bring us to himself! Let us not think of the bitterness of the draught, but of the sweetness of health which it is designed to produce. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not

much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

OCTOBER 8.

"*Verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*"—Matt. xiii. 17.

Some may suppose that our Lord here uses what scholars call an anticlimax, and be ready to say, Surely "a prophet" is above "a righteous man." Yet there is wisdom and design in the order in which he has mentioned these characters. A prophet was not necessarily a righteous man. Balaam prophesied, but followed the wages of unrighteousness. And the Saviour assures us that he will disown many in the last day as workers of iniquity, who prophesied in his name, and in his name did many wonderful things. And when the Apostle exhorts the Corinthians to covet earnestly the best gifts, he adds, And yet I show unto you a more excellent way—adding, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." So superior is grace, not only to all natural, but even supernatural endowments and capacities. He that humbleth himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of God. O that we were wise, that we understood this! But here we see the folly of men, who are eager to enjoy those distinctions which are confined to few, and never insure eternal life, while they disregard those privileges which always accompany salvation, and lie open to all. And we see the goodness of God in rendering what is essential to our highest welfare universally accessible. All cannot amass wealth, but all may be rich in faith: all cannot rise in the state, but all may sit with Christ in the heavenly places; all have not opportunity or capacity to acquire human learning, but all may become wise unto salvation. None can be "prophets" now, but all may be "righteous men."

We here see that the desires of the great and the good are not always gratified. We think it hard when the schemes on which we set our fond hearts are denied us. But we must learn to leave our wishes with God, and refer them to his goodness and wisdom. There may be reasons, for the refusal of which we have no apprehension. He is often constrained to say to us, "Ye know not what ye ask." Let the Lord choose our inheritance for us. And let us not murmur or complain if we are called to drink of the same cup with the most dear and eminent of his servants. Moses, who had conducted his charge for forty years, and brought them to the border of the promised land, was forbidden to enter, and no importunity could revoke the mortifying sentence. David, who so anxiously longed to build the temple of the Lord, and for which he had been preparing materials all through life, was not allowed the pleasure. "And many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

They who have known something of the cause and glory of Christ will long to see and hear more. These persons had been favoured with some information concerning the Messiah, otherwise they could not have expressed these desires; for we cannot desire what we are entirely ignorant of: but the glimpse made them eager for the vision, and the dawn for the full day: the assurance made them eager for the reality, and the foretastes for the full fruition. It is always so. Knowledge keeps the possessor from self-satisfaction: and the more proficiency a man makes in any art or science, the less will he be disposed to say, "I have attained, I am already perfect." It was a man who had seen more of the glory of God than any human being, who cried, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Let a Christian know as much of Christ as Paul did, and he will think he knows nothing, and exclaim, "That I may know him."

In the knowledge God communicates to his creatures there are various degrees. The patriarchs knew more than the descendants of Seth before the Flood. The Jews under Moses and the Prophets knew more than the patriarchs. John's disciples knew more than the Jewish Church before them. The disciples of Jesus knew more than the disciples of John: and he that was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John himself. And how much more did the Apostles themselves know after the effusion of the Holy Ghost than before, according to the intimation and promise of the Saviour! "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear

them now: howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth." And the same remark holds with regard to personal experience. There are many classes of scholars in the same school of Christ. How wise are some Christians! how clear, and full, and influential are their views of Divine truth! How cloudy and indistinct are the conceptions of others! they resemble the half-enlightened patient in the Gospel, who "saw men as trees walking." The stations and callings of men differ; and some require more knowledge than others. We are like the members of the body, all are necessary, but all have not the same office. The eye is for seeing, the hand for working: the one requires light; the other strength.

Above all we should learn from hence to compare our advantages with those of others. If superior, their pre-eminence should be applied to three purposes. First, to produce gratitude. "He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." Not that our gratitude is to turn on the destitution of others: but we need contrasts to excite our feelings. Thus to induce us the more to be thankful for health, we compare ourselves with those who are made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto them. And thus we teach our children to say,

> "Not more than others I deserve,
> Yet God hath given me more;
> For I have food while others starve,
> Or beg from door to door."

And did we deserve our religious privileges? Did it depend upon us in what country we should be born, whether heathen or Christian, popish or Protestant? Or from what parents we should descend, whether such as would neglect our souls or bring us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Who sent us an evangelical ministry? Why have we been fed with the choicest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock have we been satisfied? "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be glory." Secondly, to promote holiness. It would be shameful if persons below us in means and advantages should be above us in attainment and practice. Surely there is to be a correspondence between privilege and duty. He who holds the largest farm must expect to pay the largest rent. Where much is given much will be required. "What do ye more than others?" The Lord does not look for much where he bestows little; and he will not accept of little where he bestows much. Thirdly, to awaken fear. "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And what ignorance can we plead? Or what want of motive? Or what refusal of assistance? "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." How did our Saviour upbraid the cities in which he had done so many mighty works, because they repented not! "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you."

OCTOBER 9.

"*All the house of Israel are hard-hearted.*"—Ezekiel iii. 7.

How is this charge to be taken? There are two things in which hardness of heart is to be known; insensibility and inflexibleness.

A hard heart is an *insensible* heart. The Apostle speaks of "men being past feeling." This is to be restrained to its subject. He does not refer to inhumanity, but impiety. Persons may have feeling in other things, but here the senselessness regards "the things of the Spirit." Feeling, though not the noblest of our senses, is the most necessary and extensive: other senses are confined to particular parts, but feeling is diffused over the whole body. When there is no feeling in a member, there is no more intercourse of the animal and vital spirits: and where feeling is totally absent, there are no remains of life. There may be life where other senses are wanting. A man may be deaf and alive, blind and alive, scentless and alive; but if he has no feeling he must be dead. Upon the same principle the Apostle says men are "dead in trespasses and sins;" and as a dead body is insensible to material things around it, so it is with the unrenewed soul: it meets all the objects and agencies of the spiritual world with indifference and unconcern. Though he is charged with numberless transgressions, and the wrath of God abideth on him, he is sensible of no burden, and though destruction and misery are in his ways, he is secure and unalarmed.

A hard heart is an *inflexible* heart.

It does not yield to *the dictates of his word.* At this a good man trembles. As he turns to the Scriptures he says, I will hear what God the Lord shall speak: but the hardened sinner says, with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" He may not indeed in so many terms, but he really says unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Though God reproves, encourages, asserts his authority, displays the reasonableness of his commands, addresses our hope and our fear, draws back

the veil that hides the eternal world, and sets life and death, blessing and cursing before them, they turn away from him that speaketh, and reject the counsel of God against themselves.

It does not yield to the *dispensations of his providence.* God begins perhaps with others; and a good man, when he sees their visitations, says with David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." It is the design of them: "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; but they rose up, and corrupted all their doings." He then comes nearer, and strikes themselves. He afflicts them in time, that they may not be condemned for ever. But they regard the suffering as the effects of chance; they feel the pain, but never think of the procuring cause, which is sin, or the final cause, which is their spiritual profit. Yea, sometimes instead of falling in with the design, they directly oppose it; when stricken they strike again: they rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and "say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Nothing can be more offensive to God than such stubbornness as this:—"In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz." It is equally inflexible to kindness and mercy. Other creatures live upon God, but they are incapable of knowing the source of their supplies; but the inspiration of the Almighty giveth man understanding, and enables him to see the cause and author of all good: and a tender heart would love and acknowledge the donor in his bounties. They are designed to encourage and allure us: they are cords of a man and bands of love, by which he would draw us to himself. And "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

It yields not to *the motions of his Spirit.* When Paul reasoned before Felix of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled; but instead of cherishing the conviction he endeavoured to get rid of it, by dismissing Paul till a more convenient opportunity; and carefully avoiding the topic when they met. Israel not only rebelled, but "vexed his Holy Spirit." The old world, by the preaching of Noah, was addressed and often excited, as we find implied in the words "My Spirit shall not always strive with man upon the earth." Who has not felt motives which have almost persuaded him to be a Christian? Who has not formed resolutions to abandon the world, and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart? Who has not had softenings of heart, in which he was drawn into retirement, and pouring out tears unto God, said, Lord, I am thine, save me! What difficulties have many had to overcome before they could advance in a sinful course! They had to break through mercies and judgments; to throw down friends and parents who kindly opposed them; yea, to trample under foot the Son of God, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace—

O seek deliverance from this evil, if you are the subjects of it. Remember that it is a most dreadful curse, and will be sure to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. But reflect still more upon its vileness, and say, O what a hateful heart is mine that feels nothing! Yields to nothing! Pray earnestly. And be encouraged by the promise, "I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Place yourselves near the cross; and look on him whom you have pierced.

And if you are saved from this evil, be thankful. "But I know not that I am saved from it. I feel such unsuitableness to duty, and such dullness, such deadness in it!" But if you were impenitent, how could you *feel* this? You should rather say, with Cowper

> "Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
> Yet, since I feel it so,
> It yields some hope of life divine
> Within, however low"

OCTOBER 10.

"*All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*"
Isaiah liv. 13.

All therefore want tuition. We are naturally ignorant, as well as guilty, and depraved, and helpless. Knowledge is not innate, but acquired. Some are always extolling nature at the expense of art: yet what would the earth be without cultivation? What would a garden be if left without keeping and dressing, but a little wilderness of barrenness and rudeness, of weeds and thorns! Such would a child be if left to himself. What makes the greatest difference between one man and another? Not the body, the limbs, the senses—In all these the savage may have the advantage: but the difference is in their minds: and the difference in their minds is chiefly owing to education. Few indeed will deny this; but many are unwilling to acknowledge their spiritual ignorance, and in the concerns of religion suppose that the way of man is in himself, and that it is in man that walketh to direct his steps. Yet though vain man would be wise, he is born like a wild ass's colt. The world by wisdom knew not God; with all their advances in civilization and science, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And what is the fact with regard to every unconverted sinner? He is

alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and because of the blindness of his heart. To enable a blind man to see, it is necessary not only to bring the lamp, but to open his eyes: and the Scripture speaks of opening the eyes of the understanding, and giving us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.

God's teaching therefore is twofold. First, external. He thus teaches us by all his works, which praise him. The heavens declare his glory, the firmament showeth his handywork, and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. But he has magnified his word above all his name. The Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The knowledge of the grand truths in the Gospel depended entirely on the sovereign pleasure of the Almighty. We had sinned, and were left to his mercy; and it was for him to determine whether we should be saved, and in what way. And how could this determination be discovered? Not by any process of reasoning, but by testimony, and his own testimony: "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." And this book contains all the information God chooses to afford us on this side the irradiations of eternity. Jesus, near two thousand years ago, was the finisher as well as the author of faith, and a curse was annexed to the man who should add to the words of the book, as well as to him who should take away. As we look for no new doctrine, prophecy, promise, or precept, so we need none. Here is information enough, if we understand, and feel, and practise it. And it is the office of the Spirit to lead us into all truth—

And thus the Lord teaches internally. For revelation does not supersede our dependence on the agency of divine grace. David, who had the word, yet prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Here is the book, but who teaches us to read? Who removes our carelessness, and fixes our minds? Who subdues our prejudices, and gives us a holy taste, so that our delight is in the law of the Lord, and we meditate in it day and night? Who shows us not only the reality, but the beauty and glory of divine things, and gives them by faith a residence and an empire in the soul? What a difference is there between speculation and experience! Between the convictions of the judgment and the decisions of the will and the ardour of the affections! The knowledge he imparts descends from the head into the heart. The illumination he spreads is not the cold barren light of the moon, but the shining of the spring sun, which not only enlightens, but warms and enlivens, and fills the earth with fertility and beauty.

Let this direct and encourage us. It is the Lord alone that teaches us to profit: he alone can render the most common truth impressive and influential. Moses had seen the Egyptians destroyed in the Red Sea, and all the multitudes of his brethren buried in the wilderness. And needed he to be taught the doctrine of mortality? Knew he not that the days of our years are threescore years and ten? and that the period of human life is as uncertain as it is short? Yet he felt that no less a teacher than God was necessary to instruct him properly: and therefore he prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And do we not see the need of this continually? Our neighbours fall around us. Death enters our houses. We feel the attacks of disease; and the decays of nature; and yet how do we live? as dying creatures? or as those who suppose they are to live here always?

But while we feel our need of this teaching let us remember that he gives his holy Spirit to them that ask him. If we perish for lack of knowledge, our sin will lie at our own door. "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We are incapable of conducting ourselves, but here is an infallible Director, who offers to accompany us, and would never leave us nor forsake us, and requires nothing but our submission—May the language of my heart be, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

OCTOBER 11.

"*Man dieth.*"—Job xiv. 10.

But how came he to die? He was not made mortal like the beasts that perish. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned."

But now there is not a day, or an hour, or a moment in which man dieth not. The frequency of the occurrence hinders much of the force and seriousness of the impression it is otherwise so adapted to produce. "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it." And not only the commonness, but the irksomeness of the event is unfriendly to consideration. The subject is too gloomy and repulsive to engage the thought of the generality of mankind: and the main concern of thousands is to keep it, or banish it from their minds. Yet their putting the evil day far off

is not putting it away. The way to die safely is to die daily. Young says, "Familiar thoughts will smooth the road to death:" and the royal preacher tells us "sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

We often see a fellow-creature in situations and circumstances peculiar to himself, and in which we shall not be called to follow him: but when we see man dying we behold an emblem and an instance of our own destiny; and we should bring home the case, and say, by-and-by I shall require these attentions—What I now hear and see I shall experience—My soul will refuse dainty meat—a shivering will seize my trembling limbs—and the world will recede from my view, and appear like land to the mariner entering the ocean. Infinitely diversified as human conditions are, they all terminate in the same result. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Death is the way of all the earth—

And what is it for man to die? It is an event the most solemn and affecting, whatever view we may take of it. It is the termination of all his busy concerns in life, and suffers him to interfere no more in any thing that is done under the sun. It is his farewell to earth with all its possessions and attractions; his eye will no more see good. It is the disruption of all his ties of friendship and kindred here; to say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister. It is the destruction of his body, so fearfully and wonderfully made, and the reducing of it to such a state of loathsomeness, as compels the survivors to bury their dead out of their sight, and to inscribe over the sepulchre—

> "How loved, how valued once avails thee not,
> To whom related, or by whom begot:
> A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
> 'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

It is his entering into a new and untried mode of being; his transition from a course of action to a state of retribution. It is a thing that cannot be repeated, and the consequences of which are irreversible: it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

So far one event happeneth to all: but there is a vast difference in men's dying, according as they are morally and religiously considered. *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.* His death, indeed, is not always very dreadful in the manner. There is sometimes a strange senselessness that attends it. Frequently even the danger of dissolution is concealed from him, and he dies "a slow sudden death." The poet's words are not true, "Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die:" for observation shows us that commonly men die as they live. The Scripture says of many of them, "They have no bands in their death, but their strength is firm." This is sometimes indeed affected rather than real. When they have died with a kind of levity and sportiveness, it has been by way of diversion. They would indeed have it supposed to be a proof of the absence of fear; but it is the effect of its prevalence—So the school-boy passes the churchyard "whistling aloud to keep his courage up." I have heard from dying lips exclamations of anguish and horror, which I should not like to publish. These are often attributed to disease; and the poor wretch is supposed to be under the influence of delirium—and it may be so—But whatever may be the manner of departure, as to those that die in their sins, the consequences are dreadful beyond imagination. If they even fall asleep as gently as lambs, they awake with the devil and his angels.

But the dying chamber of the children of God and the heirs of immortality is none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven. We are affected to see them going; it would be criminal not to feel, and to pray, Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men. We lose much by their removal; but our loss is their gain. Dying to them is but resting from their labours; is but departing to be with Christ, which is far better—*The righteous hath hope in his death.* "I know," says he, "whom I have believed. Mine eyes have seen his salvation. The warfare is accomplished. Let me go forth and take the crown of glory that fadeth not away. Let me leave this vale of tears and enter into the joy of my Lord"—

> "O glorious hour, O bless'd abode,
> I shall be near, and like my God;
> And flesh and sense no more control
> The sacred pleasures of my soul."

Do all the Lord's people die in rapture? By no means. Various circumstances may affect their views and feelings, but they all die equally safe, and the issue is equally glorious. And in general the Lord is peculiarly indulgent to his dying followers. Their peace is compared to a river, and that river enlarges as it approaches the sea—Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Peace not only compared with the end of others, but with much of his own previous course. As to his condition and experience, the day was dark and distressing but at eventide it was light. All this the Christian may safely commit unto the Lord. It is his duty and privilege to take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and also the good. And these shall be proportioned to each other by him who has commanded us to seek for grace to help in time of need, and has promised that as our day is so shall our strength be

But we thus see that though the religion of Jesus does not exempt us from dying as men, it prevents our dying like them. It prepares us for the change. It turns the curse into a blessing. It brings to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

OCTOBER 12.

"*Full of grace and truth.*"—John i. 14.

In another place it is said, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." But things may come by a person who is not possessed of them; or he may possess them and not be filled with them—But he was "full of grace and truth."

"Grace" peculiarly signifies goodness, kindness, tenderness, mildness. And was he not full of these? We cannot tell what kind of person he had, but we are sure of his temper and disposition. It was prophesied of him that he should come down like rain upon the mown grass; that he should gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that were with young; that a bruised reed should he not break, and a smoking flax should he not quench—And follow him in the days of his flesh. See him having compassion upon the multitude, because they had nothing to eat. Hear him saying to the poor and afflicted, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Ask the woman who was a sinner whether he was not full of grace, when he said, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." Ask the widow of Nain whether he was not full of grace, when he met her at the funeral of her only son, and said unto her, Weep not, and restored her last comfort to her embrace? See him in sight of Jerusalem weeping over it, not at the thought of the sufferings they were going to inflict upon himself, but of the miseries they were drawing down upon their own heads.

The influences of the Spirit are often called grace, because they flow from the free and undeserved favour of God. Of these he was full. He had every moral excellency in him, and in a perfect degree. All his people have the same spirit in measure, but he had it without measure. He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. If the holiest man on earth were to dwell with you, you would find a deficiency in his grace. But Jesus was full of grace. Grace was poured into his lips, into his life: it filled every thing he said, every thing he did.

And he was replenished not only for himself but for us. It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. And in him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Thus in the famine Joseph had all the corn, and Pharaoh said to the people, Go unto Joseph. Yet his stores, though great, continually diminished, and at length were exhausted. But the fullness of Jesus, however numberless the relieved, remains the same, and could supply myriads more.

He was also "full of truth." It would be a low sense to say that he was full of sincerity. But as he did no sin, so neither was guile found in his mouth. What therefore he said could be relied upon by those who heard him; and as you have his words you may rely upon them too. But he was full of truth, as truth is opposed to figure or to error. The one is the truth of reality or accomplishment. The law was a shadow of good things to come: but he was the body. There was enough in him to realize and verify all the types, ceremonies, and sacrifices of the preceding dispensation. He was the true bread that came down from heaven; the true rock that followed the people in the wilderness; the true tabernacle; the true temple—or the truth of all this.—The other is the truth of doctrine. Darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people: but for this end was he born, and for this cause came he into the world, to bear witness to the truth. What truth? For there are many kinds of truth. The truth he communicated was religious truth; the highest kind of truth; the truth that makes us wise unto salvation; the truth that shows us how we can be pardoned and sanctified, and attain eternal life. To be led into all this truth is wisdom, liberty, and happiness. Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. Go away! Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

OCTOBER 13.

"*Peter, therefore, was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*"—Acts xii. 5.

It is pleasing and useful to contemplate the wise and good in trying scenes: to see what they do in the hour of danger and distress; what is their resource, and how they make use of it. The church was now in a state of great suffering and alarm, on account of Peter's imprisonment and intended execution; but alone, and at their family altars, and in their social and public meetings, they made prayer unto God for him. Prayer is the refuge and solace of those who are in any trouble—It is therefore graciously prescribed, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." "Is

any afflicted! let him pray." It is one of the designs of affliction to excite us to pray more frequently, and more earnestly: and God, who knows the importance of the exercise, and what will conduce to it, says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

We also see that intercession or praying for others, as well as for ourselves, is a duty. Thus our Lord teaches us, when we pray, to say, "*Our* Father"—and "give *us* day by day *our* daily bread." Thus we are commanded to pray for all men—and surely therefore for the servants of Christ, and those who are suffering according to the will of God. Let us not be selfish in our devotions. Let us be grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Let us weep when we remember Zion: and give the Lord no rest till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Indeed Christians ought to value intercession as a great advantage afforded them. They wish to relieve others, but how little can they do for the distressed personally! They long to be useful in the cause of their Lord and Saviour; but many of them are denied this luxury, as far as it depends upon office, talent, and wealth: but all have influence—all can pray—all have power with God—he despiseth not the prayer of the destitute, but will hear their prayer.

The church here was fully aware of this; and we see the weapons, so to speak, with which the first Christians fought against their enemies and for their friends. If, says the Saviour, my kingdom was of this world, then would my servants fight—indeed they would, and show that kind of courage which the many only admire. But his kingdom is not from hence: and therefore though they do fight, the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, and mighty through God. They are submission, patience, tears, prayers. The church therefore thinks not of violence or resistance: yea, they do not draw up a petition and present it to Herod. They go at once, not to the jailer, but the judge; not to the servant, but the Lord of all. They knew that Herod was under his control: and therefore prayer was made for Peter continually. The Lord exercises a twofold empire over men. The one is spiritual and saving; when he enlightens and sanctifies them; and puts his laws into their minds; and writes them in their hearts. The other is providential; when, without converting them, he changes their purposes, or defeats their pursuits. Thus it is said, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and he turneth it like the rivers of water;" which, led into another channel by the husbandman, retain the same qualities, and flow as freely as before. Nehemiah therefore did wisely when he wished to obtain a favor from Ahasuerus; "I prayed," says he, "unto the God of heaven:" and God disposed him to grant more than he could have requested. So Esau armed four hundred men, intending when he set off to kill Jacob: but Jacob wrestled in prayer; and having prevailed with God, he found no difficulty in succeeding with man. Accordingly his brother's mind, though not sanctified, was softened; and when they met they fell on each other's neck, and kissed each other—"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Hezekiah went and spread the letter before the Lord, and prayed, and conquered Sennacherib upon his knees.

Let us therefore, when we wish even to carry an enterprise with our fellow-creatures, engage the Lord on our side; and follow the admonition of David, who had often tried the measure and found it successful: "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." And the Church here found it to be true.

OCTOBER 14.

"*And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*"—Acts xii. 6, 7.

How well is God characterized in the address of David; "O thou that hearest prayer!" "Ask," says he, "and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find." He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. It is impossible to read the Scripture and not see what an honour he has always put upon prayer. Indeed much of the Sacred History is only a record of its achievements. The deliverance before us was in answer to prayer, which was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. But we may remark three things connected with the deliverance itself.

Observe the time when it was obtained—It was the very night preceding the day that Herod would have brought him forth to the people, like a wild beast, to be put to death for their entertainment. The Lord intended to hear their prayers from the beginning; but he suffered their faith and patience to be tried to the uttermost. A few hours more!—But before the morning the decree goes forth, Peter is released, and the Church like them that dream! He designed to relieve the woman of Canaan who cried to him so piteously on the behalf of her daughter; yet he exercises her with three repulsive discouragements before he proclaimed her success. He had en-

gaged to deliver the posterity of Abraham at the end of four hundred and thirty years, yet the last month, the last week, the last day of this period had arrived before the accomplishment of the promise: and if they are not rescued before the next dawn, the Divine bond is forfeited. But there is time enough for payment—"Even the self-same day it came to pass that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Thus even when he has determined to give, he holds his people in suspense; and he has reasons for his conduct. He is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. These delays operate like the repulse of the Israelites from Ai; they lead to self-examination and inquiry. They tend to destroy creature-confidence. They induce us to receive the blessing with more notice and thankfulness. It is a great thing to be prepared for a mercy, as well as for a trial. But hope deferred maketh the heart sick—And here is the patience of the saints. Yet let them quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. Let them remember how long he waited for them—that he is a sovereign, and has a right to choose his own time—that his time is the best time—and that though he seems slow he is sure. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence. Never despair, though Isaac be even bound, and laid on the altar, and the hand has seized the knife, and aimed the blow—

> "Just in the last distressing hour
> The Lord displays delivering power;
> The mount of danger is the place
> Where we shall see surprising grace.'

Observe also the state in which, when the salvation arrived, the subject of it was found—He "was sleeping between two soldiers." Asleep! in such a condition! in such company! in such a place! at such a time!—when there was only a step between him and his execution—when he was in the jaws of death! But his cause was good, his conscience clear, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed on God. Such a frame of soul would turn a prison into a royal chamber, and make a pavement of clay a bed of down, and enable the possessor to say, in the midst of danger, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me—"So thou givest thy beloved sleep." The Lord has comforts for his people answerable to every exigency, and as the sufferings abound, the consolation abounds also; so that they are often a surprise to themselves as well as to others; their new experience exceeding so much their former feelings, and falsifying their gloomy apprehensions. Yet this is only the fulfilment of the promise, "*as* thy days so shall thy strength be." Peter was one thing out of prison and another in it. He who trembled at the question of the damsel in the judgment-hall, can now sleep so soundly as to require a blow to wake him, though in the morning he is to die in all the horrors of a public execution.

Again, let us observe the instrument employed in the rescue—"Behold the angel of the Lord came upon him." And what marvellous beings are these messengers! They are called "his mighty angels:" and how well are they said to "excel in strength!" Peter seemed perfectly secured. He had been committed to no less than sixteen soldiers, who were to lose their lives if he escaped. Some of them even guarded the doors; but the angel easily enters without their perceiving him. The prison was dark, but he finds his way to Peter. He was chained to a soldier on his right hand and to another on his left. The angel strikes a light; smites him on the side; severs him from his fetters; tells him to arise, and put on his sandals, and follow him—without disturbing his keepers—and opens the gates, and sets him free to return to his praying friends. How little we can judge of the nature and agency of invisible beings! One thing however we know, that the highest of God's creatures are his people's servants. Though they are innumerable, and have among them thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, and the "least of them could wield these elements," "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" What monarch is attended in his journeys like the poorest, meanest child of God? "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

What right have Christians to despond? Is not he whom they serve continually able to deliver? Whatever be their straits and difficulties, he can find or make a way for their escape. That, at what time they are afraid, they may trust in him: he has not only given them exceeding great and precious promises, but he has taught and encouraged them by examples. They can remember the years of the right hand of the Most High: and they know that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

OCTOBER 15.

"*And his rest shall be glorious.*"—Isaiah xi. 10

We need not ask *whose* rest is here spoken of: for there can be no uncertainty respecting the appropriation. The whole chapter is a prophecy or promise of the incarnation and kingdom of the Messiah; and the verse from which these words are taken is expressly applied to him by Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, and there is no other that could verify and fulfil it but himself: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glo-

rious." But we may ask what is this rest of his, to which is ascribed such an attribute, or such an abstraction; for the margin is, His rest shall be "glory."

His rest includes that blessed state into which he entered after his mediatorial work on earth. Never was there such an enterprise as he had to accomplish: the execution of it would have been infinitely above the power of men and angels. But he could say to the Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And what was the result? "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his:" the one reposing after the redemption of the world, as the other did after the creation; and each thereby giving rise, as the Apostle remarks, to a Sabbath—the one to the seventh and the other to the first day of the week. Who can imagine, so to speak, the refreshment and satisfaction of the Maker of all things, when he looked and "saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good?" So Jesus having obtained eternal redemption for us, for ever sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. There he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. There he possesses the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross. There he sees his seed, and prolongs his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand. There he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. There, for the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour; angels, principalities, and powers being made subject unto him; and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and his rest is glorious—

His rest means his Church. "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." And whatever the world may think, "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey." The glory of the Church does not arise from multitude without character, from riches and pomp, from splendid buildings and magnificent ceremonies. What glory would there be in a community dignified with all that is pagan, and all that is popish, yet destitute of the truth as it is in Jesus, of spiritual worshippers, of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost? We read of "the Spirit of glory and of God" resting upon Christians. And the one explains the other. It is the divine presence that ennobles as well as defends it: "I will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her." With him is the fountain of life, and in his light we see light. But if the church of Christ be glorious now, how much more glorious will it be found in a period which we are persuaded is already begun, when its numbers, and graces, and usefulness shall be increased with "all the increase of God;" and the assurances upon which our longing hopes repose shall be fulfilled: "The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation:" "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." "I will make thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations"—His rest shall be glorious.

His rest also intends that repose into which he brings his followers. This rest indeed, as to its fullness and perfection, remains for the people of God in another life. And how glorious this will be, exceeds the power of language to describe. Yet turn only to the representation of the angel to John. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." But we which have believed do enter into rest: and how glorious are the earnests, the foretastes, the beginnings of it, even here! when the understanding is freed from the perplexities of error and doubt; and the conscience is pacified from the horrors of guilt, and the torments of fear; and the heart is delivered from unattainable and vexatious desires; and the will no longer resists the pleasure of the Almighty, with regard to duty or events: and the mind is kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. The wicked are like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt; and what anxieties and disquietudes must men of the world feel, who have their portion in this life exposed to a thousand accidents and changes, and who have no confidence in God as presiding over all their concerns, so as to promote their welfare. But the believer's treasure is in heaven, beyond the reach of harm: and he knows also that all the ways of the Lord towards him are mercy and truth. He has cast all his care upon one who careth for him, and whose care is accompanied with infinite wisdom, power, and love. He therefore is careful for nothing, but feels a peace that passeth all understanding. His soul dwells at ease. He is

satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord.

Such is the Saviour we preach! This is the rest wherewith he causes the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing! His followers may have tribulation in the world, but in him they have peace. He will more than make them amends for all their services and sufferings in his cause—Yea, he has done it already. What they have been required to give up, they have willingly resigned, for he has blessed them with advantages and pleasures infinitely richer and sweeter. They have meat which others know not of; they have joy which strangers intermeddle not with. He is not only their physician, but their friend; not only their refuge, but their consolation.

But what shall we say to those who neglect so great salvation? Can creatures content the cravings of immortality? Can any earthly successes or indulgences give you heart-felt repose? Could the whole world sustain and solace you, when trouble comes? when your gourds wither? when your pulse intermits! and upon your eyelids sits the shadow of death? Such a moment will come; and then to whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory? But he cries, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Venture upon his gracious invitation; and he will give you rest—rest unto your souls—AND HIS REST SHALL BE GLORIOUS.

OCTOBER 16.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—Matt. xxv. 34.

WHAT a delightful announcement! And now perfectly opposed to the tremendous sentence addressed by the King to them on his left hand; "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." There, "ye cursed;" here, "ye blessed of my Father." There, "Depart from me;" here, "Come." There, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" here, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Observe the character: "Ye *blessed of my Father.*" Some bless themselves, and some are blessed by their fellow-creatures; but the great thing is to be blessed of God. How vain would be, in all our most important exigencies, the friendship of mortals, however kind or powerful they may be! But in his favour is life. Their blessing is wishes and words: his blessing is deeds and realities. In his blessing there is an actual communication: "He commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore:" and they whom he blesses are blessed, and none can reverse it—And how vain would the censure of the world be, under the smiles of God! Let them curse, but bless thou!

But in what are they blessed of his Father? It must be something peculiar and distinguishing. Temporal mercies they have in common with others. Even here indeed there is great difference as to efficiency and enjoyment. They have the good will of him that dwelt in the bush in their comforts: and because he "*blesses* the labour of their hand," and "*blesses* their bread and their water," therefore "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked:" for the "blessing of the Lord it maketh rich" without abundance, and "he addeth no sorrow with it." But what says the glowing thanksgiving of the Apostle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ." He has redeemed them from the curse of the law; justified them from all things; called them by his grace. He feeds them with the bread of life; adorns them with the garments of salvation; and gives them the earnests and foretastes of immortality.

Observe the invitation: "*Come*, ye blessed of my Father." Men, if judged by their dispositions and actions, often say unto him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." But what is now their desire will hereafter be their misery. Now they have diversions, but then they will be abandoned to thought, and feel themselves in a condition in which nothing could avail them but his friendship. O the dreadfulness in that day of being renounced for ever by him!—But what a heaven will there be in the sound, "Come!" The invited were once without him, and far from him; and hence their degradation and wretchedness. He pitied them even then, and was concerned to bring them to himself. He therefore said, Come, ye poor, and I will relieve you; come, ye sick, and I will heal you; come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come to my cross; come to my throne; come to my house; come to my table; and I will in no wise cast you out. And thus their intercourse with him began—and how is it carried on?—and how will it be completed? In the same way—"Come." Here they were made to feel their absolute need of him; here they sought him; here they often asked others, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" Here they also found him and enjoyed him—But all their desires and their hopes were not perfectly accomplished. Now they have reached the end of their faith, and are satisfied. "Come," says he, "come" to my imme-

diate presence, "come" to my bosom, "come," and be for ever with the Lord—"Come, ye blessed of my Father."

Observe the induction: "*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Every word is significant. The *possession.* Not a mansion, an estate, a city, a province; but a portion more extensive and dignified, and suited to the highest ambition of the soul, a "kingdom." The *qualification:* "Prepared for you." It was not a natural endowment, or an easy acquisition. How many things were to be removed, and how much was to be done and suffered by an agency and passiveness the most illustrious! "I go, said he, "to prepare a place for you:" and his ascension was necessary, and his death was necessary, and his obedience was necessary, and his incarnation was necessary, and all the dispensations of his grace and providence were necessary to the full salvation of a soul. The *earliness* of the provision: "Before the foundation of the world." How impossible was it that we should be saved by works of righteousness that we had done! All was purposed, planned, promised, secured, not only without our desert, but without our desire, and ages and ages before our existence—The grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Observe the season of enjoyment: "*Then.*" Here they walk by faith, not by sight. If they build tabernacles here, they are soon taken down; and a voice is heard, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." Every thing leads them forward. Now they sow in tears; now they will reap in joy. Now they run; then they obtain the prize. Now they fight the good fight of faith; then they will lay hold of eternal life. Now are they the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what they shall be. They are princes, but the world knoweth them not. Like David they are anointed, but not crowned—But "*then* shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Let us walk worthy of him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory. Especially let the prospect animate us in all our religious course. It was this language that influenced so powerfully the first Christians. They thought they always heard—and their faith, their conscience always did hear—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And this enlivened them in duty. This raised them above worldly losses. This sustained them in every trouble, emboldened them in every conflict, and made them in all these things more than conquerors through him that loved them. Ah! said they, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

OCTOBER 17.

"*There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*" —Philemon 23, 24, 25.

Thus closes this short and very interesting Epistle, and which does so much honour to the humility, and kindness, and wisdom, and godliness of the Apostle. It ends with a salutation from his connexions, and a benediction from Paul himself.

The salutation regards Philemon, and comes from five persons mentioned by name.

The first is "Epaphras." He had been a faithful minister in the Colossian church, and did not forget them when he was absent from them, always labouring fervently for them in prayer, that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. He was now at Rome, and a sufferer with Paul; perhaps in the very same confinement; if not in the same cause. This cause was not the service of sin or sedition, but the Gospel of Christ: the Apostle therefore calls him "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus."

The second is "Marcus." Not Mark the Evangelist, but John Mark. His mother had a house at Jerusalem, at which, when Peter was delivered from prison, the Church was praying. He was the nephew of Barnabas. He soon became a minister; and when Paul and his uncle returned from Jerusalem, Mark accompanied them as far as Perga in Pamphylia: but feeling or fearing the difficulties and dangers of his work, he there departed from them, and returned home. This was doubtless improper conduct, and some time after gave rise to a sad dispute between Paul and Barnabas; the one being willing to take him again along with them, the other refusing, because of his former defection. Perhaps both of these great and good men were a little to blame, the one being too partial, and the other too severe. However this may be, Mark was afterwards not only received by Paul, but recommended to the Colossians, "If he come unto you, receive him;" and to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." He also was now at Rome with him. He had acknowledged his fault and been reformed, and we are not to break a bruised reed, nor to reject a returning backslider. If

a brother be overtaken in a fault, they who are spiritual should endeavour to restore him. Many a character has been given up too soon. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were afraid to act an open part at first; but they came forward and honoured the crucified Saviour when all his disciples forsook him and fled.

The third was "Aristarchus." He was a Macedonian. He became a zealous Christian, and attended Paul to Ephesus, where, in the tumult raised by Demetrius the silversmith, he narrowly escaped with his life. He accompanied Paul in his return to Greece: waited for him at Troas; journeyed with him into Asia; and sailed with him to Rome, where he now was, and probably involved in the persecution of Paul, for in his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle calls him his "fellow-prisoner."

The fourth was "Demas." At this time therefore he was a professor of Christianity, and probably a preacher of the word. But when Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy he says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." We are not informed whether he was drawn away by the attraction of pleasure, fame, or wealth. It was probably the latter. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Why should we be scandalized at apostasies like these? Did they not attend Christianity from the beginning? Were they not found in the purest state of the Church? They go out from us because they are not of us. Evil men and seducers may wax worse and worse: "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his."

The last is "Lucas." He was "the beloved physician." By his skill he could render himself useful even to the bodies of men: and to the honour of the profession be it observed, that we have always found men of this learned and liberal order, the most ready to exercise self-denial and beneficence in the service of suffering humanity. But Luke employed himself also in writing. He was the third evangelist; and compiled the Acts of the Apostles. Of the last four of these five saluters of Philemon it is observable, that Paul calls them "his fellow-labourers." The name is sometimes applied to those who are not expressly ministers of the word. He calls Priscilla and Aquilla his "helpers in Christ;" and speaks of "those women who laboured with him in the Gospel." He does not mean that they taught publicly in the church, a practice which he had forbidden: but there are many ways in which we may be fellow-helpers to the truth, consistently with every other duty. But the term is more usually significant of those who laboured in word and doctrine; and it is probable that this was the case with each of these individuals.

But let us observe the benediction of Paul himself. This is more extensive than the salutation. The salutation is addressed to Philemon only; but this takes in his wife Apphia, and Archippus his fellow-soldier, and the church in his house; and therefore he says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your* spirit." If there be one word which was dearer to Paul than another, it was the word "grace." Indeed we may call it the darling word of inspiration. But why is it named the grace "of *our Lord Jesus Christ?*" Because by his obedience and death he was the medium of its extension to the children of men. And because also he is the source of its residence; it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. Hence we are commanded to be strong "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Hence it is said, "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."

But why does the Apostle say "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your *spirit?*" Because this is the principal seat of all real religion. Out of this are the issues of life. And therefore it is said, "Take heed to your spirit." We are no longer in a right state than while we are in "a right spirit;" and this—and the Apostle perfectly knew it—is and can be no further right than as it is possessed and influenced by this grace. This grace will make it a spirit of faith, a spirit of love, a spirit of adoption. This grace will lead it into all truth, and prepare it for every duty. This grace will enable it to resist temptation, to bear prosperity, to endure affliction, to triumph in death. The Apostle knew that fresh supplies of it were necessary, but he knew also, not only from his own experience, but from the declaration of the Saviour himself, that it was equal to every season, every condition, every exigency; for he had said to him, and to every believer, "My grace is sufficient for thee." This therefore he deemed the most important endowment he could wish for his friends. Had he known any thing more valuable, he would have implored it on their behalf. But he knew grace was the best gift. He knew that nothing could be a blessing without. He knew that every thing could be a blessing with it. He knew that it was profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Let us seek it for our connexions. Let us seek it for ourselves—The reality of it if we have it not—and the abundance of it if we have. "Amen."

OCTOBER 18.

He will subdue our iniquities."—Micah vii. 19.

The language is expressive of joyful confidence. But the allusion is military, and well accords with the experience of every partaker of Divine grace who finds the spiritual life a warfare. The adversaries to be subdued are their "iniquities." They have enemies without, but their worst enemies are within. Even the world and the devil could do them little hurt without the assistance of thes treacherous inmates. In this sense a man's foes are they of his own house. But are not their iniquities enemies to others as well as to Christians? They are, and will be found so in the end; but at present others are deluded by them, and take pleasure in them. Whereas Christians have been awakened and enlightened to see their condition while led captive by them, and have been led to throw off their yoke, and to declare war against them, a war the most trying and awful, a war that admits of no accommodation, a war that must end in our victory or destruction.

But are they not already delivered from these enemies? Does not the Apostle thank God that they are "made free from sin, and become the servants of righteousness?" They are made free from its tyranny. It no longer reigns in their mortal body that they should obey it in the lusts thereof—Yet it lives, and resists, and often alarms them into a dread of being again overcome—"Mine iniquities prevail against me." But the apprehension is groundless. Sin shall not have dominion over them, for they are not under the law, but under grace. The Lord is on their side. Their friend, their helper, their conqueror is Divine—"*He* shall subdue our iniquities." Who is the agent? "Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord?" Here is the only real Sanctifier: and therefore we read, that "through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body;" that "we have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit;" that "we live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit." What are the means? The principal instrumentality is faith. Some imagine that faith is rather opposed to holiness; but there is no true holiness without it. Abraham, who believed God, is distinguished pre-eminently for obedience: and he who has the faith of Paul will never want the works of James. Faith in the blood of Jesus, faith in the promises of God, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; that faith alone enables us to stand in the evil day. This faith purifies the heart—The "sanctified," says the Saviour, "by faith that is in me." All the ordinances of religion are called means of grace, because in the use of them we receive "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Under the blessing of God the dispensations of Providence conduce to the same end. Afflictions, which are the effects of sin, are made "the fruit to take away sin." Creature comforts are often to the soul what suckers are to the tree; and the heavenly Husbandman prunes us to secure the sap for the bearing. We are tried, that we may come forth from the furnace as gold, losers indeed, but gainers by the loss, deprived only of what injured our excellence; and rendered more valuable and useful.

But in what manner is the work accomplished? The Lord could at once execute the blessed deliverance, but as the Canaanites were driven out by little and little, so he gradually subdues our iniquities. Hence we read of "the inward man being renewed day by day:" and of our being "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." We must therefore distinguish between the commencement and the finishing of this glorious renovation. It will not be completed till death, but it is now begun; and the very complaints of the believer are proofs that he is not what he once was, but approves things that are excellent, and delights in the law of God, and feels his remaining corruptions to be his burden and grief. Simon Brown, formerly a minister of the Gospel in London, was so enervated and depressed as to believe that his soul was annihilated, and that he had no more soul than a horse. Yet he continued praying, and preaching, and publishing, as if he had two souls instead of having none; his reasonings abundantly disproving all their conclusions. Thus we have met with Christians who imagined they had no grace, while they lived so conscientiously and consistently, mourned for sin so deeply, prized the Scripture so highly, and loved the Lord Jesus so fervently, that they seemed to every one but themselves to have a double portion of the Spirit. When a man is nailed to the cross, he may linger on for awhile, but his doom is fixed: and "our old man is crucified." A tree, after it is plucked up by the roots, has some sap left in it, and will even throw out shoots; but we know that in such a case it *cannot* revive: the radical essential support is cut off—It *must* wither and die. Let us thank God and take courage. The conflict may be protracted, and we may sometimes be ready to faint, but there is nothing doubtful in the issue: and the result is not more glorious than sure.

OCTOBER 19.

"*David carried it aside into the house of Obed edom the Gittite.*"—2 Sam. vi. 10

It was a solemn and awful appeal David made, when "he sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely

I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Accordingly as soon as he was fully enthroned over all Israel, he resolved to bring up the ark from Gibeah, where it had long been, and place it in Jerusalem, where it would be public and accessible. But at first the enterprise more than failed. The appointed and prescribed mode of conveying the ark was on the shoulders of the Levites. On the present occasion this was strangely and very culpably overlooked. It was carried in a new cart; and it was driven by Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab. "And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of firwood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." The event seems mysterious. His judgments are a great deep. But will not the Judge of all the earth do right? We are sure there is no unrighteousness with God. We know also that he alone is the adequate judge of moral conduct. By him actions are weighed. He sees them in their principles and motives; and unerringly estimates the circumstances of extenuation or aggravation attached to them. Let us give him time, and we shall be constrained to acknowledge, "Thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest."

David was both *displeased* and *terrified*. His displeasure was very censurable. Did it become him to resent what God had done, and be angry because the breach had defeated his plan, and disappointed his expectation—especially too, when all this would have been prevented, had he consulted the law, and conformed to it? But so true is it, "a man's foolishness perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." His terror was more excusable, and might have been salutary. "God will be known by the judgments which he executeth." When he strikes some he intends that others should hear and fear, and turn unto the Lord. And it is well for us to feel our unworthiness and desert; and to inquire whether we who are spared are not equally guilty with those who are cut off; and also whether, though spared now, we shall escape always? Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.

But David's alarm was servile and excessive. He therefore broke up the assembly, and began his return home, saying, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" "So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." The event to Obed-edom was wholly unexpected. Little did he imagine, when he rose in the morning and joined the holy procession, that before he retired to rest his house would be the tabernacle of the Lord, towards which the eyes and thoughts of all the pious would be turned, and his name be had in everlasting remembrance. So Saul went out to search for his father's asses, and before he returned was anointed king over Israel. When David was carrying provender to his brethren in the camp, how little did he dream that in the course of a few hours he should be the conqueror of Goliath, and the deliverer of his country, and hear it shouted, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands!" As to evil or as to good, we never know what a day may bring forth; and therefore we should never presume or despair. We talk of novels and romances; but we need not have recourse to fiction. What marvellous coincidences diversify actual life! "Time and chance happen to all." Nothing is indeed casual with regard to God. He sees the end from the beginning; and works all things after the counsel of his own will; and his providence is so universal and minute, that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered. But what is appointment with him is contingency with us. The most important and interesting occurrences in our individual histories are often peculiarly accidental: in review they appear surprising; and in prospect, had they been announced, would have seemed improbable, if not impossible—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Obed-edom's compliance was very praiseworthy. How many, had they been placed in his circumstances, would have declined the reception of the ark! Some would have pleaded danger—They could not live under the same roof with this mysterious and dreadful symbol, which had killed Uzzah, who only touched it, and smote so many of the Bethshemites who only looked into it. Some would have felt the expense it might entail. Some would have excused themselves on the ground of trouble—"multitudes will be constantly repairing hither, either from devotion or curiosity. The house will be a thoroughfare. We shall find it necessary to engage door keepers"—But if any of these thoughts occurred, they had not a moment's weight with Obed-edom. Providence, says he, has laid this service in my way—It is the call of God

—and I seize with gladness an opportunity afforded me to show my love to his service, and to exercise self-denial for his sake.

And what was the consequence? Had he reason to repent of the forwardness of his zeal? The ark, says our Henry, is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment. And what says the sacred historian? "And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

OCTOBER 20.

"*He doth devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.*"—2 Sam. xiv. 14.

Some emblems of this appeared under the law. Many persons ceremonially unclean were banished for a time from the camp, the city, and the sanctuary; but means were ordained and prescribed for their cleansing, their release, and their restoration. But let us look at the conduct of God towards his people in the means he devises for their redemption, their conversion, their recall from backsliding, and their removal home.

Man was made after the image of God. God delighted in him, and held communion with him. He was perfectly holy, and perfectly happy: the heir of immortality, and the lord of all in this lower world. These views of man only serve to enhance his fall, and make his loss so much the more deplorable. He is not now what he originally was. Adam was banished from paradise; and Cherubim, with a flaming sword, were placed to prevent his return to the tree of life. And we were banished in him—In Adam all died. We were deprived of the favour and presence of God; and separated from the supreme good; and resembled traitors, who having forfeited their right to their former abode and possessions, wander exiled from place to place, not daring to appear where once they lived, lest they should be apprehended and executed. What a state was this to be in! But it was not of God that his banished should be expelled from him. He desired not the death of sinners; and therefore he devised means to deliver them from the sentence of condemnation, and to bring them back to his favour and presence. And what were these means? They were such as evinced not only his clemency, but showed that he was rich in mercy—We could never have found out, and all the principalities and powers above could never have found out, a way for our return to God, consistently with all the perfections of his nature. But his understanding is infinite. O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! He forms a plan in which he abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence; a plan which angels desire to look into; a plan, the development of which will draw forth the praise and wonder of eternity, a plan in which goodness and justice shine forth with equal beams; in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; in which, while he redeems Jacob, he glorifies himself in Israel; in which, while the guilty are pardoned, the law is fulfilled, and magnified, and made honourable; in which, while there is peace on earth and good-will towards men, there is glory to God in the highest. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ."

Redemption, however, is one thing; salvation is another. We have seen what God has done to bring us out of our guilty state: but we must also be brought out of our depraved state. We are darkness; how are we made light in the Lord? We are the servants of sin; how are we turned from the power of Satan unto God? The grand agency is the influence of the Holy Spirit; and hence we read of our being born of the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit: and we are assured that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But among the means devised for our conversion is the dispensation of the word by preaching: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." There is not only a great and obvious adaptation and suitableness in this instrumentality to the purpose designed, but it is the ordinance of God's own appointment; and is therefore entitled to his blessing. Accordingly faith cometh by hearing. In the beginning of the Gospel, and in every revival of it since, the work has been principally accomplished by preaching. Were any given number of converted individuals now living to tell what God had done for their souls, how many of them would ratify this truth! One would say, I had not a serious thought of God, or of my soul, before such a sermon, like a clap of thunder, awakened my sleeping conscience. A second would say, I was a Pharisee, trusting in myself that I was righteous, and despising others, till such a discourse, like a scythe, mowed down all my legal hopes, and made me cry for mercy. A third would say, I was walking according to the course of this world, spending my money for that which is not bread, and my labour for that which satisfieth not, till such an address urged me to forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding—But we do not limit the Holy One of Israel. There is hardly any thing but the Lord has dignified by making use of it in the calling of sinners to himself. Afflictions, as we see in the case of Manasseh; parental example; the admonition of a friend; the reading of a good book, of a mere tract—Where shall we end? "Lo! all these things

worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."

After they are brought to God by converting grace, his people are not suffered to apostatize from him. But they may backslide. Their faith may fail in the exercise, though not in the principle. Their love may wax cold. They may grow indifferent to the service of God, and rarely and lifelessly attend the means of his appointment. Yea, they may yield to temptation, and fall into sin, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. And what is the consequence! The Lord hides his face, and they are troubled—"O that it was with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; while as yet the Almighty was with me." The loss and the remembrance of their former peace and joy; galling reflections from their own minds; brotherly rebukes; outward trials and disappointments—these are the means he employs to bring them back to himself from whom they have revolted, and who is yet saying, Return, ye backsliding children —I will heal your backslidings.

But as long as they remain here they are from home. This is not their rest. But there remaineth a rest for the people of God. And he has devised means to remove them from the kind of exile in which they now are, to their own country, from whence they were born, and whither they long to return. He has appointed an hour in which they are to depart out of the world unto the Father. Death is the way, and however trying, the right way to the city of habitation. By death their banishment is entirely ended, and their restoration perfected for ever. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

OCTOBER 21.

"*Whose I am, and whom I serve.*"
Acts xxvii. 23.

This was the language of Paul, when he informed his fellow-sufferers of the angelical vision with which he had been favoured in the night. But others may adopt the same avowal.

He calls God his owner, when he says, *Whose I am*, and asserts nothing that is peculiar to himself. We also are his. He has numberless claims to us; and these claims we should feel and acknowledge. They are founded in creation: in providence: in redemption: in self-dedication. The Corinthian converts "gave themselves unto the Lord." And there has been a time in the experience of every Christian, when he has done the same. And he has often renewed the surrender since. And the more he reflects upon it the more he approves of his conduct, and glories in the thought that he is not his own, but the Lord's.

Yet when he adds, and *whom I serve;* some may be ready to say, "Ah! Paul did serve him. He was called to be an Apostle; to preach the Gospel, to write Scripture, to plant churches, to work miracles. Never did one man perhaps do so much in glorifying God and serving his generation as he—But what can I do! Can I serve him?" But let it be observed that the service of God is not confined to great offices and talents. These do not depend upon us, but are dispensed by the Lord of all as he pleases; and he looks to the heart, and where this is towards him, desires are actions. Where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. He sees benevolence where nothing is given, and martyrdom where nothing is suffered. "Let her alone; she hath done what she could."

"No blank, no trifle Nature made or meant.
—If nothing more than purpose in thy power,
Thy purpose firm, is equal to the deed.
Who does the best his circumstance allows,
Does well, acts nobly—angels could no more."

The service of God is very extensive, and is not to be confined to what many only mean by it. It reaches further than express acts of devotion. The means of grace are indeed both duties and privileges; and they who do not value them are either in an unconverted or a backsliding state. In a proper frame of mind, good men will sanctify the Sabbath, repair to the sanctuary, and retire to read the Scripture, and pray and meditate. But they will regard these things only as *means* of grace, in the use of which they renew their strength, and gain fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ to enable them to fill up Christianly the whole of their stations in life. They therefore serve God in the week as well as on the Sabbath, and in their own dwellings as well as in the temple. They acknowledge him in all their ways; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God. A constant regard to his word as their rule, and his honour as their end, elevates common actions into moral, and moral into spiritual; and thus the magistrate while upon the bench, and the traveller while upon the road, and the tradesman while in the shop, and the labourer while in the field, and the mother while training up her infant charge, are all doing the work of the Lord, and have the testimony that they please him.

Servants, besides their known, usual, regu-

lar course of action, are liable to particular and occasional calls of service which cannot be previously prescribed. Thus we are to observe the movements of Providence, and fall in with those duties which grow out of events. In this spirit David said, "on thee do I wait all the day;" holding himself always in a readiness to receive orders, and in effect asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

"They also serve that wait." There is a suffering as well as a doing service. God is never more pleased than when we deny ourselves, and show that we love him above all, and are willing to leave all, and lose all, for his sake. As the exercise of the passive graces is the most difficult, so perhaps it is the most impressive. We peculiarly glorify God in the fires. We are witnesses for him; and testify to the excellency of the principles, and to the power of the resources of the religion we profess. We show that his grace can support us when every other dependence fails, and his comforts cheer us when all other springs of refreshment are dried up. When by accident or sickness we are led in from active scenes, we fear we are going to possess months of vanity, while perhaps we are entering some of the most useful parts of our life. If we endure as Christians, the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon us; and by our patience, submission, peace, and joy, some around us are instructed, some convinced, some encouraged—while perhaps superior beings are excited to glorify God in us—for we are a spectacle to angels as well as unto men.

But what is the nature of the service in which we shall be engaged in the heavenly world? when we shall have dropped all our infirmities? and our powers will be equal to our work and our wishes?—"Therefore are they before his throne, and serve him day and night in his temple." "His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face."

OCTOBER 22.

"*There stood by me this night the angel of God.*" Acts xxvii. 23.

How Paul was now engaged we know not. Perhaps he was praying. This is the resource of the Christian in every storm; and to this the promise is made, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Nor can we determine where he was. Considering that he was a prisoner, and so many on board, it is not likely that he had a cabin to himself. Yet he seems to have been alone: at least the privilege was personal and individual. There were near three hundred in the ship, but none of them was aware of what was passing with Paul. The Lord, in the same assembly, and in the same seat, can hold communion with one, and not with another. "Lord, how is it," said one of his disciples, "that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" The question implies wonder; but our Saviour had promised the distinction. Luke was in the ship, but Paul only has the vision. All the partakers of Divine grace are not allowed the same indulgences. All the apostles were not to witness the raising of the ruler's daughter, and our Lord's transfiguration and passion; but only Peter, James, and John; and though he loved them all, John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was not Luke, but Paul, that was to appear before Nero—Paul was the sufferer; and Divine comforts correspond with our trials, for "as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolation aboundeth by Christ."

Two things are observable. First, the messenger: the *angel of the Lord*. We know little of angels. The name is expressive of their office, rather than of their nature. They seem to have been the first beings created; they are proverbial for wisdom; and excel in strength: yet they do his commandments, and hearken unto the voice of his word. He saith to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to each of them, Do this, and, whatsoever it be, he doeth it: for it is his will alone they regard; and they are always satisfied and delighted with it. They are elevated above us in rank and estate, yet they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be the heirs of salvation. Such honour and happiness have all the household of faith: the highest of God's creatures are his servants; they rejoice over them in their repentance, encamp round about them in trouble and danger, convey their souls at death into Abraham's bosom, and in the morning of the resurrection will gather together their bodies from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. They will be our associates for ever—We *are* come to an innumerable company of angels.

Secondly, the season: *this night*. It was dark, pitch dark: not one star appeared. How was the angel to find Paul far off upon the sea in such a dense obscurity? We are not to judge of their senses by ours. They see not as man seeth. The darkness hideth not from them, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to them. It was a period of extremity. The Lord could have given Paul the assurance before he had been so long tossed with the tempest; but it was withholden till all hope that they should be saved was taken away. This is what his people have often experienced. His reasons for delay are founded in wisdom and in kindness. He would destroy creature-confidence, and yet teach us never to despair with regard to himself. His conduct shows us that nothing is too hard for the Lord: at eventide it shall be light. It

also displays his glory more to cure when the disease has been pronounced desperate, and all other physicians have withdrawn. Hence he abode two days in the same place, after he heard of the case of Lazarus, and was glad for the sake of his disciples that he was not present to recover him from his sickness, as it would confirm their faith more to see him raised after he had been dead four days.

OCTOBER 23.

"*Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island.*"—Acts xxvii. 24—26.

Let us observe the angel's address to Paul; and Paul's address to his companions.

The angel's address contains two things. First, an admonition. "Fear not, Paul." There is nothing by which Christians honour their religion more than by confidence in danger, and cheerfulness in trouble. It would therefore have been lamentable had Paul on this occasion failed in spirit; and exposed himself to the reproach Eliphaz unjustly applied to Job: "Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Yet it would seem that the frame of his mind began to be weak and wavering. He had nature in him as well as grace. He had eaten nothing for a length of time, and was exhausted with fatigue. He knew what it was to be enervated. In one of his epistles he speaks of being "in weakness, and fear, and much trembling." In such a case the body depresses the mind; and a man has hardly the command of his own principles. Was Paul afraid whether he had done right in appealing unto Cæsar? Did he begin to shudder at the thought of appearing before such a monster as Nero? Or was he afraid of sinking? The Lord knew his frame; and remembered that he was dust.

Secondly, an assurance. "Thou must be brought before Cæsar." This was the appointment of God; and it was to answer very important purposes. There his bonds were to be made manifest in the palace, and in all other places. There he was to testify the gospel of the grace of God, and to induce others to speak the word without fear. There he was to make converts to Christianity, and converts even in Cæsar's household. Such was the design of God, and as this purpose *must* be accomplished, Paul's preservation was secure. Even a providential destination has rendered the fulfiller of it invulnerable, and insured his success, as far as he moved in the line of God's appointment. We see this in the case of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. All our times are in his hands, and we are immortal till our work is done. The assurance includes not only himself but the whole company: "And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." The angel could have rescued Paul, and left the crew to perish; but to save them all for his sake was attaching importance to Paul, and putting honour upon him. And in this way the Lord magnifies his people now. The world knoweth them not, yet it is owing to them their very existence is continued. They are the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Nations are blessed for their sakes: and though now they are overlooked because they are not heroes and statesmen, in the annals of heaven they are called the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God."

Observe also Paul's address to his companions in tribulation. It was tender: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer." Paul had a feeling heart; and the state of his fellow-sufferers; their pale faces; their haggard looks; their shrieks when the vessel rolled or plunged: the thought of so many perishing, and perishing for ever—for there were in all two hundred threescore and sixteen: all this deeply affected him. He therefore now rejoices on their behalf, and eagerly hastens to alleviate their terror and anguish; and hopes too that the long-suffering of God would prove their eternal salvation.—It was confident: "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Thus he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform. Owing to this he felt as safe and composed as if already on shore. We have every reason to believe what God has spoken; and not only is his honour, but our own profit concerned in our believing it—It is the only way to solid comfort in such a world as this. Surely if ye will not believe ye shall not be established. But thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee.—It was predictive: "Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island"—not a continent, but an *island*, and a—*certain* island—and we must be *cast* upon it, that is, wrecked there; the vessel will be destroyed, though the passengers will be preserved. Why does he mention and particularize all this? To be a sign; that when the fact should have taken place, all might be persuaded that Paul spoke

from divine authority. This is the design of all prophecy; it is not to amuse and perplex us in the previous study, but to confirm our faith by the event; as our Saviour more than once remarked, "These things I have said unto you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe."

The prediction was soon followed by the accomplishment: "And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita."—And how was Paul viewed then? When he first came on deck, they probably considered him an enthusiast, if not an impostor; and if they did not revile him, they pitied his weakness, that he should expose himself to so many hardships and dangers for the sake of one Jesus who had been crucified, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. But the storm convinced them that Paul had good reason for his attachment and confidence. While they were filled with confusion and horror, he knew whom he believed, and was not ashamed of his hope. They called every man upon his god, but none of them could hear or save their suppliants. But Paul's master could save to the uttermost: and he not only delivered his servant, but the entire crew for his sake—So he can bring our adversaries to our feet, and make them know that he has loved us—So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth—For their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges.

OCTOBER 24.

"*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*"
Mark ix. 24.

How many subjects are there, concerning which a Christian is frequently compelled to express himself in these words—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

This in the case, sometimes even with regard to the being of a God. It may seem almost impossible that we should feel any doubt with regard to a truth so obvious and undeniable as the Divine existence. Many would probably deem a discourse against atheism altogether unworthy of their attention. They would observe that Moses, in the book of Genesis, does not attempt to prove a Deity, but takes it for granted; and that only a fool would say in his heart, there is none. Yet who has never, in any instance or degree, been affected by this folly? And who, while he acknowledges that no truth can be so unanswerably proved, does not feel that no fact is so confounding? Who has not been dazzled into a momentary blindness by the very splendour of the light? We own that there are difficulties in Christianity, but what right has a Deist to be scandalized with these mysteries? As Christians, we admit nothing so mysterious as what he admits along with us—

"A God allowed, all other wonders cease."

And who can reflect on a Being who is self-existent, who never had a beginning, with whom nothing is past and nothing is future, who is no wiser now than at the creation, who knows all things actual and all things possible, who is everywhere at the same time, governing all worlds, and organizing the minutest insects—and never be urged to exclaim, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

This is the case sometimes with regard to the truth of revelation. Here again some may be ready to wonder. "The truth of revelation! Can a good man ever question this? Is it not the charter of his privileges? the very basis of all his hopes? And if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" This they feel; and therefore every apprehension, however partial, however far from settling into a conviction, so alarms them. Bunyan says, that all through life a thought would occasionally rush into his mind, "perhaps the Scripture is a falsehood:" and nothing he says can describe the shock, the momentary impression gave to his feelings. Many now living have felt the same. The most powerful objections to the Gospel are not always those that are circulated in coffee-houses, and handed about in sceptical pamphlets. Many insult rather than argue: and contemn while they oppose. They do not enter far enough, nor grapple earnestly enough, to feel those difficulties which serious minds meet with, who must study the subject, and are all alive to the importance of it. There is not one of these but has often exclaimed, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

This is the case, too, with regard to Providence. Here the doctrine is admitted and resisted: received in theory, and denied in practice. I believe that in the management of my concerns, God does all things, and that he does all things well. I can easily reason myself into this satisfactory conclusion, for it is only to allow that he is wise, and righteous, and good; and therefore that he must always do right. Yet I seem to be often arraigning him, or wishing to direct him. Hence I am so unwilling to submit. Hence I am so prone to repine and murmur. Hence I am so full of anxiousness and foreboding. Hence I am so little able to cast all my care upon him, knowing that he careth for me—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

This is the case, too, with regard to the promises. Here again "what unbelieving believers are we!" I see these promises in the Scriptures, like the stars in the heavens. They are exceeding great and precious. They

suit all my wants, and are fully sufficient to relieve them. I love them exceedingly. I long to claim and appropriate them as my heritage for ever, and to feel them the rejoicing of my heart. Yet when I read, though the God of truth says it, and he cannot deny himself—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. I will be with thee in trouble. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be"—I am often as if he had said nothing! "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

And well may the Christian thus pray, when he considers the evil of unbelief, and knows how dishonourable it is to God, and how injurious it is to himself. "If ye will not believe," says the Prophet, "surely ye shall not be established." The word preached cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith. In prayer we must ask believing, or we shall not receive. We read of the obedience and of the joy of faith. We walk, we live by faith. And no wonder the Christian feels the remains of his unbelief; and weeps over them —And he *will*, with this father of the child, "cry out, and say with *tears*, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

But this is a token for good. And while you bewail the weakness of your faith, and you ought to deplore it, we must encourage and comfort you concerning it. What we are going to advance may be abused, but it will be first usurped by those to whom it does not belong: and it is not easy to hinder all stealing. We say then, First, that these lamented remains of unbelief shall not be suffered to condemn you. Secondly, there is nothing in them peculiar to your experience: all your brethren are familiar with the same complaints. Thirdly, the power of the evil is already broken, and shall never have dominion over you again. Fourthly, the very existence of it will soon cease for ever. Lastly, it is possible even now to subdue much more of the very being of it: so that it may much less oppose and distress you—He that hath begun the good work in you giveth more grace, and is the God of all grace. He can cause your faith to grow exceedingly; and fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

OCTOBER 25.

'*Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.*"—Micah vii 14.

HERE is obviously an improper punctuation. It affects the meaning, and injures the force of the passage; in consequence of which, the reader may be led to suppose that Carmel was the place in which the captives were *now* disadvantageously dwelling: whereas, it was the place in which it was desirable for them to feed. The colon pause therefore, should be set after the word "wood:" and then the reading will be according to the Hebrew structure, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood: in the midst of Carmel let them feed, in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." For "Carmel" was not a barren, dreary, wilderness country, but consisting of fine open pasture land. It is never mentioned without commendation; and is therefore here named with Bashan and Gilead. Indeed, in the Scripture it is often used, as well as "Sharon," proverbially, for any scene of richness and fertility.

The prophet refers immediately to the Jews, who were exiled in Babylon, and implores their restoration to their own country, where God would deal with them according to the most favoured and flourishing periods of their history. But when we consider the symbolical language of the sacred writers, and the typical nature of the Jewish dispensations, we are authorized to pass from the natural, to the spiritual Israel.

We may observe, therefore, the persons to be favoured. They are called "his people." He has always had a people for his name: and to know who they are we need not ascend up into heaven, to examine the divine purposes: we have the book of life in our hands, where they are recorded, though not by name, yet by character; and he may run that readeth. They are described as "the flock of his heritage." While this expresses them to be sheep, it holds them forth collectively as all one in Christ Jesus; and shows the interest Jehovah has in them. A man may have a flock in his temporary possession, and under his superintendence; but though it be the flock of his care, it is not the flock of his heritage. In the East a person's whole substance often consisted in his flocks and herds: of course he would feel a peculiar concern in them as his own. And the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. His portion is his people. And he derives the revenue of his glory from them. They are also said to "dwell solitarily in the wood." There are few around them with whom they can feel congeniality; for we may be alone, though surrounded with company. Yet here is not only solitariness, but unlikeliness of supplies, and exposure to danger. Are not the afflictions of the righteous many? Are they not sometimes perplexed and comfortless? Are they not often timid and alarmed, like sheep and lambs in a wood, when they hear beasts of prey howling about them?

See therefore the blessing implored on their behalf: "Feed thy people with thy rod." The "rod" is the symbol and instrument of the shepherd; and the word "feed," by a common figure of speech, that puts a part for

the whole, is significant of the discharge of all his office. The meaning therefore is, that the Lord would lead them by his word and Spirit, in the way that they should go. That he would heal them when wounded or diseased. That he would restore them when they run astray. That he would guard them from all their perils. And especially that he would provide them repast and repose. We mention these together because his sheep not only hunger and thirst, but are frequently weary-worn and faint. Hence the inquiry for *both:* "Tell me where thou *feedest*, where thou makest thy flock to *rest* at noon." And when the believer realizes the blessings of his salvation, and appropriates the promises, and enjoys the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and feels the refreshment of divine ordinances, and can leave all his cares with the providence of his heavenly Father, he knows what David means, when he says, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

But how was the privilege to be dispensed? "In the *midst* of *Carmel* let them feed, in *Bashan* and *Gilead*, as in *the days of old*." Thus nothing less is implored than the richest measure and degree of provisions and indulgences. But are suppliants to be choosers and prescribers? And shall they who are not worthy of the least of all his mercies, not only ask for relief, but the noblest entertainments? Yes; such is the condescension and kindness of Him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He has said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Our Saviour reproves his disciples for the contractedness of their asking; "hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Let us pray therefore as Paul did, not according to our meanness and unworthiness, but "according to the riches of his glory"—When Alexander bestowed a valuable boon, the favoured partaker said, "It is too much for me to receive." But the conqueror of the world replied, "It is not too much for me to give."

The prayer we have reviewed was very great—But was it answered? Read the very next verse. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things." So sure is it that he is a God, hearing prayer. So often does he fulfil the promise, "While they call I will answer, and before they speak I will hear."

OCTOBER 26.

"*When he had by himself purged our sins.*" Heb. i. 3.

THERE is a cleansing from sin by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost: and we read of the Saviour's cleansing his Church with the washing of water by the word. But here the purification has another import. It was well understood by the Hebrews from their own services —It is to clear from guilt by atonement, or to remove iniquity by expiation, so that it will not be imputed or punished. Without shedding of blood there is no remission; and in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. This is the meaning. And therefore it is spoken of as a thing done already, and accomplished when he died upon the cross. For it is said he accomplished this purging of our sins—

"By himself." This has a twofold reference. It distinguishes him from the high-priest under the law. *He* put away sin typically; but it was not by the sacrifice of *himself*, but of the victims whose blood he shed and carried into the holy place. But Christ washed us from our sins in *his own* blood; and through the eternal Spirit he offered *himself*, without spot, to God; and thus purges the conscience from dead works. It also shows us that he was alone in the work, without a partner, without a helper, without a comforter. He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him. This was even signified by his stipulation in the garden; "If ye seek me, let these go their way:" and also by the conduct of his disciples, when "all forsook him and fled."

Here we see the vastness of his love—That he would interpose on the behalf of those who were guilty and deserved to suffer. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son." And he was under no constraint or mistake. He well knew what his engagement would cost him—yet he was more than willing—yet, dreadful as the scene was, when it drew near, he turned not away his back, he repented, not of his undertaking—Yea, he said, I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Surely such love passeth knowledge!

But we see his greatness as well as his goodness—that he *could* purge our sins by himself. Think of the millions of sinners saved; think of the myriads of sins with which each of them was charged; and the evil there was in every sin—Yet "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all! And he taketh away the sin of the world! And his blood cleanseth from all sin!" This would seem incredible; but it is called "the blood of God," that is, of One who was Divine as well as human. No wonder *he* not only finished transgression, and made an end of sin, but brought in everlasting righteousness; not

only satisfied the law, but magnified it, and made it honourable.

Hence let us never think of adding any thing to the efficacy of his sacrifice by our doings or sufferings. This was the great point so urged by the Reformers. They differed in many things, but *here* they were perfectly agreed, and resolved rather to die than to yield—that nothing should blend with the death of Christ as the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our plea, for acceptance and justification with God. In one thing they have been mistaken. Much of what they said against good works applied only to Popish good works, that is, to abstinences and performances enjoined only by will-worship and the traditions and commandments of men. They honoured what the Scripture means by good works, works done by the grace of God, and according to the rule of his own word—Yet these, even these, much as they valued them for other necessary uses, they excluded in whole, and in part, from *that* work of which the Saviour said, "It is finished."

Let us also beware of diminishing its virtue. We really take from its all-sufficiency when we feel and talk as if it was not *by itself* fully adequate to all the purposes of a sinner's relief. O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt? This sacrifice has satisfied Divine justice; why should it not satisfy thy conscience? why art thou afraid to rely upon a complete, an infinite propitiation for sin? So far as the East is from the West, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Think of this, and joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. That atonement, when we trust in it and plead it, renders us dearer to God than even a state of innocency could have done—It is an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. Think of this, and let it give you boldness and access with confidence in your approaches to God. Think of this, and let it support you under all your trials. All may be rough under foot, but all is calm and clear over head. Men may frown, but God smiles. He may chastise, but he cannot condemn; and the correction is in love to your souls, and designed for your profit. Here is the tree for the healing of the waters of Marah.

And you, poor convinced sinner, you diminish its value unless you find in it enough to encourage even you, and even in sight of all your desert! We blame you, not for believing that sin is exceeding sinful, or feeling that the load of it is a burden too heavy for you to bear. You ought to ask, "How shall I come before the Lord, and bow before the high God?" And it is well to be convinced that you have no sacrifice of your own to offer. But there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Surely *he* hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrow. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Be not faithless, but believing.

> "Should worlds conspire to drive me thence,
> Moveless and firm this heart should lie;
> Resolv'd, for that 's my last defence,
> If I must perish, there to die."

OCTOBER 27.

"*And as they followed, they were afraid.*"
Mark x. 32.

In these men we see a representation of Christians—*Following;* but *afraid.* The one showing their constant character; the other their frequent experience.

They are followers of Christ. They follow him under various allusions. They follow him as sheep follow the shepherd that is leading them to pasture. It is to himself he refers when he says, "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." They follow him as beggars follow a benefactor from whom they are seeking and expecting alms and relief. They follow him as travellers follow a guide who shows them the way. They follow him as soldiers follow a commander who leads them to warfare and victory. They follow him as servants follow their master to receive and execute his orders. More frequently they are said to follow him as disciples follow their teacher, whose doctrine they profess, and whose example they imitate. For he is not only their instructor, but their model; to him they are to be conformed. He goes before them in doing and suffering—"If any man," says he, "will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." And who is he that requires us to be humble and tender? He who was meek and lowly in heart. Who is he that requires us to be condescending? He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; he who washed the disciples' feet. Who is he that requires us to be liberal? He who was rich, and for our sakes became poor. Do we suffer? He suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In this view we are to consider him, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds. When ready to despond or repine, let us look before us, and see him bearing a heavier burden, bearing it for us, and bearing it without a murmur and without a groan.

But while they follow, they may be afraid. Let us arrange the fears of his followers in three classes. First, there are those fears which are commendable. For they are enjoined to "pass the time of" their "sojourn-

ing here in fear;" and God himself says, "Happy is the man that feareth always." Such is the fear of caution and vigilance which they are to maintain, as opposed to the carelessness, heedlessness, and rashness of those who expose themselves to temptation, and feast themselves without fear. Such is the fear of diffidence, which keeps us from trusting in our own hearts, and depending upon our own resources and resolutions, either as to duty or trials. Such is that fear of the Lord, in which David resolved to worship towards his holy temple, and which he connects with God's forgiving mercy. It is a fear of offending him, and grieving his Holy Spirit. The first Christians walked in the fear of the Lord; and we may judge what the nature of it was, and learn that there was nothing debasing or distressing in it, for it was united with "the comforts of the Holy Ghost."

Secondly, those which are censurable. Such is the fear of man that bringeth a snare, and which led Nicodemus to come to him by night, and Peter to deny him thrice. The righteous should be bold as a lion. His cause is good, and his defence is sure—"For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Such is a slavish fear of God, who ought to be always viewed as our father and our friend. He will not reject us for our infirmities, but spare us as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. We are accepted in the Beloved, however unworthy, and are complete in him, however defective. "We are redeemed," says Zechariah, "that being delivered we might serve him *without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives."

Thirdly, those which are neutral—for we know not how to commend or censure them. They are constitutional rather than moral. They arise from the state of the animal spirits; and depend on a disordered bodily frame. Much of the apprehension of death, and many of those feelings which they call temptations of Satan, and doubts, and fears, are often physical effects. They should endeavour to distinguish things that differ, and have a juster view of their state than to be affected in their conclusions by a variation in the weather, or in their animal economy. Yet how much are such persons as these entitled to our sympathy and prayers! We are sometimes much tried in dealing with them, but they refuse to be comforted, because they cannot at present take comfort, and their very religion produces a kind of unbelief—They tremble at the thought of presumption. Yet at the very time these tremblers, like "Fearing" in Bunyan, often fear nothing else but coming short at last. They are willing to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; and, like Caleb, to follow him fully. And when others decline, and the Saviour says to them, Will ye also go away? the answer rushes up from every feeling of their soul, "Lord, to whom should we go but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life."

Am I addressing such an one? Art thou sighing, "If I am a follower at all, I seem only like Peter, to follow him afar off. At best I come in like one of Gideon's followers, pursuing, yet faint, and ready to halt. Or with the disciples before us, and "they were amazed," and "as they followed they were afraid." Yet I dare not go back; I cannot turn aside—he is all my salvation and all my desire—no joy can be compared with serving and pleasing him."

Well he knows your frame. Your desire is before him, and your groaning is not hid from him. You may write bitter things against yourselves—but this is what he writes: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast not denied my name." Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land—

"Where doubts and fears shall never come"—

And we shall "be quietness and assurance for ever."

OCTOBER 28.

"*It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.*"—2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

There is no difficulty in conceiving that "it is a righteous thing" with God to recompense tribulation to those who are troubled. It was their desert; and righteousness consists in rendering to all their due—But how does this apply to those who were troubled? Surely when they have done all that is commanded them, they are unprofitable servants, and their defective obedience deserves condemnation rather than reward. We should not wonder therefore if the Apostle had said that it was a *gracious* thing with God to recompense them. But it is also an act of righteousness. Though it would be injustice to make a man suffer beyond his desert, it is not unjust to reward him beyond his desert. A man is not at liberty to punish sovereignly, but in his favours he is free, and he may do what he will with his own. God is infinitely good: in the covenant of grace he has provided for the acceptance of his people; and they are accepted in the Beloved; and God has bound himself not only to pardon, but even to honour and recompense their services and sufferings. Hence says our Saviour, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against

you falsely, for my sake: rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." And hence says Paul to the Hebrews, "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." It cannot be supposed that a cup of cold water, given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, could merit eternal life: yet, if the Lord has promised that it shall not lose its reward, it would be an unrighteous thing in him not to reward it.

But what was the blessedness to be recompensed to these Thessalonians? "Rest." This is a representation of the heavenly state frequently given us in the Scriptures. It is sometimes spoken of in allusion to the rest of the Sabbath. Thus the Apostle says, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God:" the word is, as the margin apprizes you, a keeping of the Sabbath. To those who now call the Sabbath a delight, and look forward to it with eager desire, amidst the toils and cares of the week, the notion is very attractive. By-and-by the Saturday evening of life will come, and they will wipe their hands of every thing earthly, and fall asleep in Jesus, and open their eyes on a Sabbath whose hallowed pleasures will know no end. At other times it seems to be spoken of under this name, in reference to the destiny of the Jews. Canaan was called "the rest" which the Lord their God gave them, and where, after the bondage of Egypt, and their tedious journeyings in the wilderness, they were to enjoy a settlement abounding with every accommodation and delight. But this was only a shadow of good things to come, a type of a better, even a heavenly country, into which death gives the true Israelites an abundant entrance. Hence the word reminds us of their freedom from every thing annoying and vexatious here. They will rest from their labours; rest from their cares; rest from their troubles; rest from temptation; rest from sin; and rest from sinners—"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

But observe how they were to enjoy it—you shall have this rest, says the Apostle, "with us"—with us, "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus," who now address you, and wish you grace and peace. Does he mention this with reluctance? No, but with delight. It rejoiced him to think that the poorest in the church of Thessalonica would be fellow-possessors with themselves, residing in the same state, enjoying the same portion. He shows the same noble disposition in another place; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Paul would intimate that the blessedness of the righteous will be social. This falls in with all the principles of our nature. We are formed for intercourse; and it is not good for man to be alone. Much of our pleasure is now derived from our connexions. It will also be admitted that many of our pains are derived from the same source. This however does not arise from society itself, but a particular state of it. It is easy to conceive what happiness association could yield us, if certain things were removed from our associates and from ourselves. Hereafter every moral defect, together with every cause of sorrow and alarm, will be done away; and each will be capable of giving and receiving unalloyed gratification.

It is pleasing to think we shall enjoy this rest with the most endeared and the most dignified society. Grace here teaches our hearts to love all that love the Lord; but there are those who are peculiarly united to us, by the ties of nature and friendship, and who are to us as our own souls. Who knows not the anguish of parting with such as these? And how intolerable would be the thought of losing them for ever! But the Scripture forbids the despair. We shall see and hear them again; we shall commune with them again; the intercourse will be renewed to infinite advantage, and be perpetuated for ever. We are commanded to comfort one another with such words—So fully does Revelation countenance our mutual recognitions in the heavenly world. But we shall also sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. We shall intermix with patriarchs, prophets, and apostles—you shall rest with *us*, says Paul—and *they* were the most eminent of men, men secondary in dignity to the Son of God himself, men who wielded miraculous powers, and foretold things to the end of time. There are persons pre-eminently distinguished from others, and for whom we entertain the most exalted respect. We look at the inanimate image of them in a picture. We read their lives with veneration; and when we reflect on their works, we are ready to exclaim, how happy should we have been to have known them! Yet were they living, and we could have access to them, we should dread as well as desire intercourse with them: we should shrink into nothing before them, at a sense of our inferiority, and feel embarrassed by delight. But nothing of this feeling will be known hereafter. Whatever distinctions may prevail, the freedom of our enjoyment will be unimpaired by them. Even angels, those glorious beings, will not confound us. The rustic will be easy at the sight and the notice of Gabriel. Yet the greatest essential will be wanting still, if we did not enjoy this rest with the Saviour himself—But we shall be for ever with the Lord.

We are therefore finally informed of the period of this blessedness- "When the Lord

Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." Not that there is no intermediate state; for as soon as absent from the body, they are present with the Lord. But till then they are not complete in number, in person, in estate. But then the body will be raised and ennobled: then all the redeemed and sanctified will be gathered together unto him; then all his designs on their behalf will be accomplished; then "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

OCTOBER 29.

"*For God blessed him.*"—1 Chron. xxvi. 5.

When Balak sent to hire Balaam, he flattered him by saying, "I know that he whom thou blessest *is* blessed." The compliment betrays profaneness, ignorance, and falsehood. But the language will justly apply to God. His voice is almighty—His words are realities—His benediction is efficiency—He whom God blesseth is blessed; and none can reverse it. Of this blessing we here read. The subject of it was Obed-edom. The occasion is marked in an earlier portion of the sacred history. It was his entertainment of the ark, when David, displeased and terrified by the death of Uzzah, refused to go on with the removal of it to Jerusalem, and carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where it remained three months.

But what was the nature of this blessing? Good men judge by a rule of their own: they walk by faith, and not by sight. They value no blessings like spiritual blessings, because these are for the soul and eternity. They therefore pray, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation." And this we have reason to believe, was the desire and experience of Obed-edom. But what is here spoken of intends rather a temporal blessing, suited to the dispensation under which he lived, and which abounded much with the promise of the life that now is. Personally considered, he had health and strength, firm nerves, and fine spirits. His undertakings flourished. His possessions were preserved, increased, enjoyed. His domestic comforts were sweetened and relished. His wife was a fruitful vine by the side of his house. His children like olive plants round about his table. Both before and after the text, mention is made of the number, the ability, and eminence of his sons. It is also said, "the Lord blessed his household—and all that pertained to him, because of the ark of God."

Let us distinguish between the circumstances and the essence of this blessing. We may then ask, Is the case of this good man a singular one? Has not our Saviour said, "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting." Have the generous ever repented of their liberality, even on a secular ground? Have the most public-spirited Christians been the least successful even in their worldly affairs? But a man's life consisteth not in the *abundance* of the things that he possesseth. A *little* that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. The blessing of the Lord maketh rich even with competency; and he addeth no sorrow with it. How much more desirable is it to inherit his blessing ourselves, and to leave it to our offspring, than to possess and to bequeath thousands of gold and silver without it!

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." So said God to the selfish and saving Jews. We say the same to you. Put his word to the trial, wherein he has said, "The liberal soul deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "He which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully." Herein we may see how little faith there is in the earth. They *shall* prosper that love Zion. A regard therefore to their own welfare should make men liberal; and if they believed the word of God, there would be forthcoming contributions enough for every private charity, and all public institutions. But we are afraid to make God our banker; and cannot rely upon his promise and providence.

Yet while we are reproved, let us also be encouraged, and stand ready to every good work. There are two cases in which we may peculiarly resemble Obed-edom in conduct and condition. The one is when we open our doors, and receive, in a way of Christian hospitality, the Lord's followers or ministers. "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The other is when, to use the words of Scripture, we have a Church in our house. This was the case with Priscilla and Aquila. It was a common thing in the beginning of the Gospel, before places were expressly built for religious assemblies. Nor is the practice unknown in many of our villages now. When the

preacher has first gone to publish the Gospel, he has been often indebted to some poor rustic who has lent his cottage to the Lord. He has sometimes drawn upon himself reproach and persecution; but the Lord has blessed him. And when also you establish the worship of God in your family, kneeling before his living oracles, and offering the sacrifices of prayer and of praise, never imagine the time employed in these exercises lost. You cannot serve God for naught, while the promise and the threatening remain; "Them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

OCTOBER 30.

"*And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.*"—2 Sam. vi. 12.

Two things may be usefully remarked here. The First is, the fame of the blessing. It was soon known and noticed. The report of it spread in all directions, and even reached the throne—"and it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth to him, because of the ark." The manifestation of the sons of God is principally future. They will hereafter shine forth from every cloud that conceals them, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The wisdom of their choice, and the advantages resulting from it, will then so convincingly appear, that those who vilify them now will be constrained to say, "we fools counted their life madness, and their end to be without honour. How are they numbered with the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!" But the Lord does not leave his people entirely undistinguished even now. He begins to honour them here. He sets a mark upon their foreheads, that the executioners may pass them by in the day of evil. He sometimes puts such a difference between them and others, that men, profane and infidel men, say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth. Even Balaam exclaimed, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. How easily, even in this life, can he bring their enemies to their feet, and make them know that he has loved them! And has he not said, "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed!"

Let us from hence learn our duty. While we are in the world, we should pray, with David; Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies; or, as it is in the margin, observers. Many eyes are upon us; and though they cannot judge of our experience, they can estimate our conduct. They will be sure to compare it with our profession; and their disposition will not suffer them to make those allowances which candour and truth require. They will magnify infirmities into crimes, and impute the miscarriages of a few to the whole body. Let us then walk in the fear of the Lord, because of the reproach of the heathen. Let us put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: yea, let us constrain them by our good works, which they behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation. Let them see that our religion is not a mere notion, but that there is a reality, and excellency, an efficiency in it, that recommends it to every reflecting mind. Let them see the advantages we have derived from it, in the government of our tempers, in our readiness to forgive, in our humility when we prosper, in our patience when we suffer, in the confidence and calmness of our minds, with regard to every future event. Let them see that we have found what others are seeking after in vain, contentment and happiness. And thus shall we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and be ever saying to those around us, "Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

The Second is the influence of it. It doubtless impressed many; but David only is mentioned. He is mentioned because of his eminence—not for its own sake—but relatively to his usefulness. The soul of a prince is no more precious than the soul of a beggar; but when the great are set in motion they draw others after them. No sooner was David informed of the blessing of God upon Obed-edom for the sake of the ark, than his apprehensions vanished, his zeal was roused, and he resolved to obtain a share of the same goodness—"So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, into the city of David with gladness." And here we see that the proofs others have shown of the gain of godliness should excite and encourage us to follow their example. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. No improvements in husbandry or trade will be long confined to individuals. Every useful invention and discovery in the arts and sciences is soon and eagerly adopted by those who are informed of them, as we see in the case of the mariner's compass, and printing, and a thousand other things. Upon this principle, why do not men embrace the Gospel, which is so evidently conducive to the personal and social welfare of mankind? What numbers have recommended it from their own expe

rience, living and dying! Let us repair to a Physician who has only, yet has so often cured the complaints under which we labour. Let us reflect upon those who have been enlightened, and pardoned, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; and pray, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father"—"We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

David not only brought up the ark, but with gladness. What we do for God we should do readily and cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver. The charity of some is like the sour emission obtained from crabs by grinding and pressing them. But it drops from a Christian like a honeycomb, or flows like a living spring. He doth all things without murmuring or disputing, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. He cannot always claim the promises; yea, they sometimes make him tremble, lest he should come short through unbelief: but he always delights in the law of God after the inward man. He cannot always rejoice in the full assurance of hope; but his meat is to do the will of his heavenly Father. His duty is his privilege. The Sabbath and the sanctuary are his attractions; and he finds it good to draw nigh to God.

But wonder not if you meet with opposition and reflection. "As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart." People will commend or excuse warmth in every thing but religion—*There* it is often decried as weakness, or ridiculed as folly. And should we encounter this in our exertions for the cause of God, what are we to do?—Do!—go forward. Do! do as David did, who bound the scandal as a garland around his brow, and said, "I will yet be more vile." So, blessed Redeemer! wast thou treated in the days of thy flesh. So didst thou bear the contradiction of sinners against thyself, thy spirit blasphemed, thy words and actions perverted, thy name cast out as evil. May it be enough for us that the disciple be as the Master, and the servant as his Lord. May we go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach; and rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

OCTOBER 31.

"*He hath opened mine eyes.*"—John ix. 30.

The miracles which our Saviour performed on the bodies of men awakened peculiar attention; but the changes which he accomplishes in the soul are much more glorious and important. The benefits of the former were limited to time, but those of the latter pervade eternity. Persons might have been the subjects of the one and have perished for ever; but the experience of the other was always accompanied with salvation.

One of the signs and wonders that were to accredit the Messiah was "the recovering of sight to the blind." And here we have an instance of it. The story is remarkably interesting and instructive—But we may consider the cure as a symbolical representation of the agency of Divine grace in healing the disorder of the mind; and so put the language into the mouth of every Christian, "He hath opened mine eyes."

They were once blind, and, like this man, were born blind. But the Lord never leaves them as he finds them. He "opens the eyes of their understanding," and makes them know the things that belong to their peace; and in his light they see light. The illumination is not perfect at once; and in other things the men of the world may surpass them. But they know themselves, they know the evil of sin, they know the preciousness of the Saviour, and above all things desire to win Christ, and be found in him. The enlightening principally and distinctively consists in a real apprehension of the excellency of Divine things. There is a great difference between a conviction that there is such a Being as the Lord Jesus, and such a perception of his glory as attaches us to him: and between a persuasion that there is such a thing as holiness, and a sense of the beauty of it: and between a belief that honey is sweet, and a knowledge of its sweetness: the one derived from report, and the other resulting from relish.

Two effects follow when the things of the Spirit are thus spiritually discerned. The one is a clearer, fuller, firmer, conviction of the existence of these things. Their lustre renders them more distinct and prominent. We feel assured that they cannot be fictitious, they must be real, must be of God. And now also our prejudices against them relax and remove; and we are open to conviction, and disposed to do justice to all evidence in their favour; and become studious of them, and long to increase by every method our acquaintance with them. For the other is, a superlative regard to them. There is now felt an influence in them that fixes the mind, and sways the will and the affections. We now seek those things that are above. The love of Christ constraineth us. To them that believe he is precious. There is no true faith without works: no saving knowledge without obedience. The seat of its residence is the heart; and the sphere of its activity the whole life.

And has he thus opened your eyes? Then adore and praise your Enlightener. Often dwell upon your former and present condition, and, like the man before us, be found

in the temple giving glory to God, and be always inquiring, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

Maintain a carriage becoming your privileged condition. You were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light. It would be shameful in you to strike against the stumbling-blocks over which the blind fall. See your danger and your duty. Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Pity and pray for those whose eyes are not yet opened. You would be concerned in other cases of far less moment and misery. You feel even for the blind beggar that sits on the bank, or is led along by his faithful dog. How much more would you be distressed at the sight of a brother, or sister, or mother, or child, in this groping and comfortless condition! Where are your feelings when you behold sinners incapable of spiritual action and enjoyment, and approaching senseless the verge of the bottomless pit?

You were once in the same state yourselves, and can therefore sympathize with those who are still in it. O tell them what you see and enjoy. Tell them light is sweet, and what a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the Sun of Righteousness. It would not indeed be kind to do this unless there was hope for them. But there *is* hope in Israel concerning this thing. You cannot open their eyes for them. And they cannot open their own eyes—But there is One to do it who *is* able, and is equally willing. Tell them what he has done for you. Tell them that he is now within call: that he is at this moment passing by: and never yet refused the prayer of the destitute.

NOVEMBER 1.

'*And he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*"—2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.

—By an experimental and practical knowledge of him, the effect of converting grace. He had been a monster of iniquity, and seemed beyond the reach of mercy. But he obtained forgiveness, and by his graciously overruled exile and imprisonment, as the means, he was induced to seek the Lord God of his fathers, and he was found of him.

The change was real and amazing, and verified the language of the prophet; "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." All conversion is a turning. In religion it means a change of views, dispositions, and pursuits, so that we become the reverse of what we were before. With some who use the term, it seems to mean much less than this, and to signify only an impression, a change of opinions, a strong persuasion—not a transformation of mind, not the renewing of the Holy Ghost, not a transition from one moral state to another. When we have heard some persons talking of their conversion under a preacher, and at such a time—for they are often very particular in the date, we have been ready to say, we know not what you were before your conversion, but we know what you are since! But if a man was proud, and revengeful, and covetous before his conversion, and remains so after it, where is the change? What should we have thought of Manasseh's conversion, had he, whatever professions he made, continued in his former ways! But there was a change in the whole of his character, conversation, and conduct. He ceased to do evil, and learned to do well. By two things the reality of his conversion showed itself.

First, he lived some years after it, and thus his religion had time to be developed. This is generally the case with the Lord's people. He calls them out of darkness, that they may walk as children of light. "This people," says he, "have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise." Many seem to view repentance as a preparation, not for life, but only for death. We must not limit the Holy One of Israel. He may call a man at the eleventh hour: but we have reason to believe the cases are very rare; and too much stress is laid by some preachers and some periodicals on these late appearances—conversions which take place a few days or weeks at most before dissolution. Even when persons have obtained that repentance which is unto life, and have died immediately after, though they have died safely, the change must have been less certain to themselves, and less satisfactory to others.

Secondly, by a peculiar turn of Providence the hand that wounded him also healed, and he "was brought again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." And now is the time to observe him. Many have quickly left the religion of a sick chamber after their recovery. The serious attention to Divine things which abasement produced, prosperity has soon dissipated. But see the triumph of this man's principles among the snares and dangers of returning prosperity. No sooner is he seated again on the throne than he sets an example becoming it. He purifies the temple, restores the worship of God, and endeavours to bring back those he had led astray. "And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar

of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." Never was there a true convert without zeal of the same kind. As soon as we feel the value of our own souls we shall prize the souls of others; and be concerned to teach transgressors his ways, and to convert sinners unto God. The earnestness we discover may offend the formal, and even the persons we strive to reclaim, may deem us intermeddlers, and tell us to keep our religion to ourselves —But this is impossible. This is telling the fire not to burn, and the spring not to flow. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." And if we bless those who consider the poor, and endeavour to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, how much more should we applaud the man who tries to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins!

"Ah! Manasseh *could* be useful. He had opportunities and means. One is ready to envy a man who is disposed to do good, and finds himself in the possession of riches, power, authority—a palace!" Yet while some may be peculiarly useful, none are compelled to be useless. There is some beneficence within the reach of every individual, if he be willing to do it. It is with usefulness as it is with water; it is to be found everywhere, if people will dig enough. Let us seek the praise conferred upon Mary, "She hath done what she could."

But observe the remark of the sacred writer; "Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only." It is said indeed that they worshipped Jehovah only in them; but it was disobedience to the Divine appointment, it was will-worship, it was superstitious. And this no doubt he reproved and endeavoured to repress, but much of the evil he could not hinder. And here we perceive that his religion did not operate so extensively and powerfully as his former depravity had done. It is much easier to seduce than to reclaim, to corrupt than to convert.

And we see this in a very affecting instance. It was the case of his successor and his son Amon. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." To leave his kingdom and the reformation he had begun to a son he had depraved by his example, but could not reform by his piety; and when he saw or heard of his profligacy and impiety, to sigh and exclaim, "Ah! I taught him all this"—was enough to "bring down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave!"

Be thankful if you were moral before you were pious; and above all, be grateful if you have been blessed with the grace of early godliness. From how many snares, evils, and pangs, have you been preserved! How pestilential have some been! "One sinner destroyeth much good." What injuries a life of twenty, of thirty years of wickedness can produce! What miseries must some feel, when, though the riches of Divine mercy have pardoned and renewed them, they think of persons whom they drew aside, and encouraged and emboldened by their example and counsels. These above all things they should endeavour to restore. "But some of them are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and despise reproof. Others are removed to a distance, and we know not where to find them. Others are dead—what can we do here?" Nothing. But seek to be useful to others. And agonize with God, that as you have been a curse so he would make you a blessing.

NOVEMBER 2.

"*When I awake with thy likeness.*"
Psalm xvii. 15.

David therefore expected to live after death, and he tells us not only that he should awake, but awake with God's likeness.

Does he refer to the state of the soul at death? or of the body at the resurrection? or to both? We love not to press a passage of Scipture beyond its proper bounds; neither would we stop short of them. Man is a complex being; and when the dust returns to the earth whence it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it. The Apostle tells us that when the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness; and that the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies. And Watts includes each of these effects in his fine versification.

At death the soul of the believer awakes with his likeness; and the resemblance which commenced in regeneration, and advanced in sanctification, is finished in glory: all the remains of sin being then done away, and nothing left but the image of God himself upon all the powers of the mind. What is the body now but a dormitory for the soul to sleep in, rather than a mansion for it to live in? What is our present state but a kind of night-scene! Much of our life now, in the view of angels, must be judged as vain and unmeaning as dreams, and will appear to ourselves hereafter like the vagaries of sleep. Nothing reviewed from eternity will be deemed solid and valuable but what has been connected with the service and enjoyment of God. To what slender dimensions then will the sum of human life be reduced! How few will appear our exercises of sense and

reason! And how short our waking intervals! Natural men are entirely asleep as to the purposes of the Divine life—*Thus* indeed Christians cannot sleep as do others. Yet they, even they comparatively slumber. They regard not many things which would strike them if they were wide awake, as they ought to be. They are often drowsy and insensible; can hardly watch and keep their spiritual senses in exercise; and read, and hear, and pray, and meditate, hardly knowing or feeling what they do. It is therefore even to these the Apostle sounds the quickening call, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." What a difference between their present and future experience! When they close their eyes in death they will awake and shake off every slumber; and all will be reality, perception, attention, energy, life. Now in the morning they wake and find themselves in the wilderness; then they will wake and find themselves in Canaan. Now they wake and find themselves among the wicked, who vex and defile them; then they will wake and find themselves with the spirits of just men made perfect, and the innumerable company of angels. Now they wake and find a law, that when they would do good evil is present with them; then they will wake and be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

But man, in his original state, was an embodied creature, and he must be embodied in his final condition. The intermediate and separate state, therefore, is necessarily an imperfect one: for the body, an essential part of human nature, is lying under the incapacities and dishonours of mortality. But this purchase of the Saviour's will be reclaimed: this temple of the Holy Ghost will be re-edified: this companion of the soul will share with it in the work and glories of heaven. And the sacred writers therefore, in referring to the future happiness of believers, commonly lead our views to this consummation. And death is expressed by sleep, peculiarly in reference to the body, and to intimate not only cessation from labour and the enjoyment of repose, but susceptibility of revival. At the resurrection, the body wakes. "Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust." They that "sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise"—And believers will awake with his likeness. We know, says the apostle John, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And this likeness is corporeal as well as spiritual. As we have, in our infirmities, diseases, and dissolution, borne the image of the earthly, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Our conversation is in heaven, says the Apostle, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." A prospect hailed ages before by Job, as the ultimate and complete solace and relief of his sufferings—"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

"This life 's a dream, an empty show;
But the bright world to which I go
Hath joys substantial and sincere;
When shall I wake, and find me there?

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God!
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul.

"My flesh shall slumber in the ground,
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound;
Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise."

NOVEMBER 3.

"*But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.*"—Philemon 22.

That is, he trusted that though he was now a prisoner he should be set at liberty, so as to be able to fulfil his ministry again for their furtherance and joy of faith. Had his confidence been inspired by the Holy Ghost, he would have expressed himself without hesitation; but he had only a hope in his own mind arising from what he deemed probability. Whether this hope was accomplished we are unable to determine; and the learned are divided in their opinion. But he intimated no more than he felt at the time; and his language shows another instance of the Apostle's address in enforcing his plea on the behalf of his object; for if, as he trusted, he should soon visit Philemon, how could his friend see his face in peace, or at least with pleasure, had he refused his request on behalf of Onesimus?

Paul was warm, but there was nothing in him enthusiastical: he feared God, but he was not superstitious: he lived above the world, but he was not a recluse—He never affected to contemn the feelings of humanity. He therefore desired that a lodging might be prepared for him against his arrival. Yet he was not fond of indulgence and show; and therefore a little would content him. He did not require the enlarged and various accommodations of a home, but only the needful conveniences of an inn; not a mansion, but an apartment: such as the Shunamite made for Elisha; "Let us make a little chamber, I

pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

And we may rest assured that Philemon would not only readily provide for him, but in his own dwelling; knowing that a man so well educated would not be finical and troublesome; and that one so Christian would be sure to be instructive and useful, and draw down the regards of Heaven. So the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the sake of the ark. So now is the Saviour's promise; "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."

Paul viewed his restored freedom as a privilege and a favour: "I shall be given unto you." In another place he speaks of ministers as "the gifts of Christ." And this is true of their commission, endowments, success, and all opportunities of exertion. It is he that gives them not only a door of utterance, but a door of entrance. It is easy to see what a hinderance of usefulness the confinement of such a man as Paul was. God is able indeed by his almighty power to overrule evil for good; but we must judge of things by their proper and natural tendency: and thus persecution involves the heaviest guilt. It is said of Herod, after the enumeration of his crimes, that "he added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison." This was taking the light from the candlestick, and putting it under a bushel. It was rendering him a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Hence, says Paul to the Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." What Christian then ought to be indifferent to the progress of civil liberty, which, justly considered, always includes religious, and affords opportunity for exertion and co-operation in extending the cause of knowledge, truth, righteousness, and peace?

But see the importance and efficiency of prayer. The prayer of Abraham prevailed for the healing of Abimelech. Joshua by prayer lengthened the day for Israel to complete their victory. By prayer fifteen years were added to the life of Hezekiah. The church at Jerusalem prayed for Peter's enlargement, and he was delivered by an angel before the prayer-meeting broke up. And what says Paul to the Philippians? "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Here also he says; "I trust that *through your prayers* I shall be given to you." Sometimes prayer succeeds in obtaining the very blessing itself which is implored: at other times the answer brings a substitute for it; as when Paul besought the Lord to remove the thorn in the flesh, and received the assurance of all-sufficient grace while under it. But the prayer of the righteous shall be granted: and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, not only when it is offered for himself, but also for others. Here also is a proof that the usefulness of prayer is not confined to the influence of the performance, but includes also success and acquisition. The prayers we offer for ourselves really affect us by the very exercise of the duty. But if our prayers for others benefit them, when at the very time they may be ignorant of our offering them, this must be by God's doing something in a way of answer. This is the very ground and encouragement of our offering them. And the Bible is filled with instances of the accomplishment of such prayers, as it is with commands for the performance of them.

NOVEMBER 4.

"FOR THEIR SAKES I SANCTIFY MYSELF, *that they also might be sanctified.*"—John xvii. 19.

HERE are two sanctifications spoken of, very distinguishable from, yet intimately connected with each other—The sanctification of Christ; and the sanctification of Christians. Let this exercise turn on THE SANCTIFICATION OF CHRIST—"For their sakes I sanctify myself."

Here the word to sanctify does not mean to renovate or purify; but to consecrate or devote. He could not be sanctified in the former sense, because his nature was not depraved or defiled by sin. But under the law, when persons or things were dedicated to God, they were considered as hallowed or holy, and to use them for any common purpose was to profane them. Thus the Sabbath was sanctified, and the tabernacle, and the temple, with the vessels thereof. Thus Jesus devoted himself to the service of God in the salvation of sinners. "Lo!" said he, "I come to do thy will, O God. I consecrate myself to be an atonement, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. I will suffer the just for the unjust, and bring them nigh who were once far off, by my blood." Here he displays the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. For,

Observe the *voluntariness* of the consecration. He does not say, I am sanctified, but, "*I* sanctify myself." He was not passive in the business; neither was he compelled. No man, says he, taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself. *He* made himself of no reputation. It was therefore with him a matter of the freest choice, and of the fullest purpose. A man walking by the side of a river, may see a fellow-creature in danger of drown-

mg, and may plunge in to save him, and perish himself in the attempt. He may be considered as falling a sacrifice to his kindness; but the sacrifice with him was only eventual, not designed. Nothing was accidental in the sufferings of Christ; nothing was unforeseen; he assumed our nature, and entered our world, for this very end—The Son of man came, not *to be* ministered unto, but *to* minister, and *to* give his life a ransom for many.

Observe also the *relativeness* of the consecration: "For *their* sakes I sanctify myself" —Not his own. He had no sin of his own to expiate. He was therefore cut off, but not for himself. He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted: but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. And he suffered not only for our sakes, but in our stead. His death was not only for our good, but for our redemption; and we are expressly assured that he redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He was therefore a true and proper sacrifice for sin. As such he was typified by the sacrifices under the law. The people were guilty. The High Priest confessed their sins, and laid his hands on the head of the victim; and having thus transferred their guilt to the substitute, he slew the victim, and taking the blood in a basin, entered the holiest of all, and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burned incense; and then came forth and blessed the absolved congregation. And thus once in the end of the world Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and then entered the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us: and to them that look for him will he come forth and appear a second time without sin unto salvation.

Nor must we forget the *expensiveness* of the dedication. This it is not in our power to estimate. We must possess the same feelings, and bear the same load, before language or imagination, however lively, can enable us to do any thing like justice to the sufferings he endured. The history is not indeed silent. It tells—how he was born in a stable and laid in a manger; became a man of sorrows; had not where to lay his head; endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; bore every kind of reproach; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. But a veil is drawn over his internal anguish. What, before human treachery or violence had yet seized him, made him to be sore amazed and very heavy? What led him to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" while his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! How well, blessed Jesus! mayest thou say, "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Finally, let us keep in mind the *unworthiness* and *vileness* of the subjects on whose behalf he thus devoted himself. We read of benefactors: but how few of them have ever exercised self-denial! And when they have made sacrifices, for whom have they suffered? Men have hazarded their lives in the field they have been wounded, they have been slain. But they bled and died for their country, their friends, their families. But "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here every Christian will look at his character and his own life: he will review his years of unregeneracy; his omissions of duty; his actual offences; his heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; his depraved nature itself, shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin: and can he only glance at this, and not exclaim, with self-abasement and wonder—

"Was it for crimes that *I* had done
He groan'd upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown
And love beyond degree!"

NOVEMBER 5.

"*For their sakes I sanctify myself*, THAT THEY ALSO MIGHT BE SANCTIFIED."—John xvii. 19.

HAVING viewed the sanctification of Christ, let me consider the SANCTIFICATION OF CHRISTIANS—"That they also might be sanctified."

This sanctification differs much from the former. It does indeed take in the notion of dedication. In this sense believers are sanctified, and they wish to regard all they are and all they have as the Lord's, not only by claim, but by consecration. And in their experience there has been a time in which they "gave their ownselves unto the Lord," saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me." But to dispose them for this surrender, and that they may be vessels unto honour, sanctified and made meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work, a change must pass upon them. Renovation and purification are necessary. New principles must be implanted; and the promise fulfilled; "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Christians therefore are new creatures, concerning whom he says, This people I have formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. This sanctification therefore is very superior to natural amiableness of temper, and outward reformation, and mere morality. It includes morality

but it includes much more: it includes piety; and while it secures the practice of all good works, it sees that the heart is right with God. At present indeed the work is not complete; but it is begun, and is advancing. The subjects of it love holiness; they mourn over the remains of sin as their greatest burden, and long and pray to be sanctified wholly, body, soul, and spirit.

But let us see what a connexion it has with the sacrifice of Christ—"For their sakes," says he, "I sanctify myself, *that* they also *might* be sanctified." Now this clearly shows us the importance of it. *We* may err in our estimation of things, but *his* judgment is always according to truth: and here we see his judgment.

And how precious and invaluable must he have deemed this sanctification, since he considered nothing too great or expensive to procure it for us! He well knew that unless we were delivered from the bondage of corruption, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, we could have no meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and must be incapable of enjoying or serving God here. This therefore was his aim in dying. "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

And we learn hence, That they do not improve his death aright who seek from it hope but not holiness. Such a desire has nothing spiritual in it; neither can it be realized. Jesus came by water as well as by blood: and these are as inseparable in their application to the soul as they were in their effusion from the cross. What then can we think of those who derive from his death even a license to sin: and who, when reproved for their evil ways, satisfy themselves that Christ has satisfied for them; and not only for their past, but for all their future transgressions—and so they have nothing to fear! But they have every thing to fear. At present they have no part nor lot in the matter; and if they die as they are, Christ will profit them nothing—For he has said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

It is equally obvious that they are badly instructed in the mystery of sanctification who think to gain it from some slavish, legal, superstitious, self-righteous methods of their own, instead of repairing to the sufferings of Christ, the only fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It is the blood of Jesus that alone cleanseth us from all sin; and this is true as to our purification, not only from the guilt, but also the love and power of it. Our old man is crucified with him. There is no true holiness separate from the cross. There he obtained for us not only eternal redemption, but all the supplies of grace.

And as the death of Christ is the source from which the Spirit is derived, so it is the principal means by which he works: for he works rationally, and in a way of argument and motive. And what can equal the view of his sufferings? There we see most strikingly the evil of sin; and there we behold the love of Christ, which most powerfully constrains us. At the sight of this the Christian rises, and says, Did he devote himself thus for me, and shall I not dedicate myself to him? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

NOVEMBER 6.

"*The everlasting God.*"—Gen. xxi. 33.

THE eternity of God is the most sublime and astonishing subject on which our thoughts can fix. Let us not darken counsel by words without knowledge. Three things may be said, and this is all we can say. First. He will have no end. If we carry our views forward, and add millions of ages to millions of years, till the mind be lost in the computation, we shall make no progress in the duration of the eternal God. A week is too long for the beauty and fragrance of some flowers. There are insects that are brought forth, and pass the several stages of their being, and die in a single day. The life of a man is compared to a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. But the oak in the forest survives several generations of possessors and observers. The earth continues through all the changes of its inhabitants. The river Jordan, which the Jews crossed, continues to wind its uneven course: and the mount Ararat, on which Noah stepped out of the ark, still remains to be seen. The heavenly bodies shine on above the reach of our revolutionary system. Yet this is only comparatively true: nothing is absolutely durable—"They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." Some creatures will endure for ever. Angels are imperishable. So are the spirits of just men made perfect. The soul will view untouched the destruction of the universe: yea, the body, though material, will be immortalized. But none of these will live for ever *like* God. He is the fountain of life; all other beings are streams flowing from him, and sustained by him. They are not immortal of themselves, but by his pleasure and bounty. But he has life necessarily and independently in himself, and is unaffected by any external cause. Therefore it is said, "He only hath immortality."

Secondly, he never had a beginning. The space of time which has elapsed since the creation seems long: the globe is near six thousand years old. But through an immensity of duration, of which we can form no idea, God had been living equal to his own happiness, and able to do whatsoever he pleased. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even *from* everlasting," as well as "*to* everlasting, thou art God." It is needless to observe that this prerogative is entirely and infinitely peculiar to God. Thus he is "the first" as well as "the last." He inhabiteth eternity, and indeed constitutes it; for, properly speaking, eternity is nothing else but the duration of his being and agency.

Thirdly, there is no change in his being, no diminution, no increase, no variableness or shadow of turning. We speak of the past, the present, and the future: but "I am" is his name, and his memorial in all generations. Our continuance is computed by periods: but his duration is one permanent now. We exist by parcels; we existed partly yesterday, we exist partly to-day, and shall exist partly to-morrow; but he possesses and enjoys his whole being at once. We never continue in one stay: infancy grows into manhood, and manhood descends into old age. Even in the Christian the outward man perisheth, and the inward man is renewed day by day; and even in heaven the saints will be changed from glory into glory; but he says, "I the Lord change not." He was never *less*, and he will never be *more* wise, and holy, and happy than he is. He will never be older than he is, and he was never younger. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.

"Why this is an abyss in which our thoughts are swallowed up." It is. And observe the inference we draw from it. Are we not therefore chargeable with the greatest absurdity, when we reject a doctrine because we cannot comprehend it? Is not this to make our understanding the measure of truth? How much reality is there that does not come within the reach of our senses, or of our reason!—We talk of mysteries. There are such in the Scriptures; and are there none in Nature? There is no doctrine we are called to believe in Revelation more difficult than this eternity of God. Every notion we can form of it involves in it a seeming inconsistency, and a real inexplicability; yet every Deist admits it; and the man that denied it would render himself universally ridiculous.

Let us therefore adore a Being who cannot, by searching, be found out unto perfection, and have grace whereby we may worship him acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear. And convinced of the infinite distance there is between him and us, let us admire his condescension. How evident is it that he does not stand in need of us, and is "exalted above all blessing and praise!" Yet we and our mean affairs have always engaged his attention—"What is man that thou shouldest magnify him! and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him! and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment!"

The eternity of God should take off our attachment and dependence from things below. Creatures, however agreeable or powerful, are "less than nothing and vanity." "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; wherein is he to be accounted of? Trust in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Creatures may die, but he liveth; and blessed be our Rock, and let the God of our salvation be exalted. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." The heavens and the earth may pass away; but his covenant is everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure. As he is eternal, O Christian, thy happiness, which is bound up in him, is secure. He is the strength of thy heart; he is thy portion for ever. Realize thy union with him in all thy exigences, feebleness, and dangers. "THE ETERNAL GOD is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

NOVEMBER 7.

"*We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.*"—2 Cor. v. 4.

By "*this tabernacle*" the Apostle means the body, which is the same to the soul as a dwelling to the inhabitant. Only it is observable that he does not call it a palace, a mansion, a house, but a tabernacle. Paul was familiar with the structure of such a kind of residence, for he was by craft a tent-maker. He knew that it had a roof, but no foundation; that it was a temporary accommodation, a moveable abode, easily taken down, easily injured, easily overturned, easily destroyed. Do what you will with your bodies, they are no better than tabernacles, earthly tabernacles. Nurse them, pamper them, dress them, adorn them, idolize them as you please, dust they are, and unto dust shall they return.

But see how he distinguishes the soul from the body, and places it above the body. He speaks of the body as if it did not belong to our persons, "*We* that are in this tabernacle"

—as if we could live and act without it. And this is possible. The soul is the man. The soul is the inhabitant. It is *in* the body, but not *of* it. It is immaterial, immortal, and capable of endless improvement. We cannot save the dwelling, but we may save the inhabitant. And should not this be our supreme concern? Does not he who knows the value of the soul, from the price he paid for the redemption of it, ask, "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Yet there are persons who live as if they deemed the soul unworthy of a moment's thought; yea, and they often die so too. They send for the physician, they employ the lawyer, they dispose of their substance, they arrange their funerals, and tell their friends where and how they choose to be buried: but not a word escapes them concerning the nobler and never-dying part—and none of the cruel and infamous wretches in the room will dare to break the delusion, and ask, What, have you no soul? Is this disposed of? Is this provided for? Where will this be found in the day of the Lord Jesus?

We have seen their residence, let us hear their complaint—"We that are in this tabernacle *do groan, being burdened.*" With what? The oppressions are numberless. There are the common evils of life. We need not read the Scriptures to know that the earth is a vale of tears; and that man is born to trouble. Who is secure from failure in their schemes? from worldly losses? family bereavements? bodily accidents and diseases? But, common as they are, some might have supposed that the friends of the Almighty would be exempted from these calamities. Yet many are the afflictions of the righteous. They have frequently more of these sufferings than others. The husbandman does not prune the bramble, but the vine. The stones designed for the temple above require more cutting and polishing than those which are for the common wall. Correction is not for strangers, but children—"What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Neither is a Christian required to be senseless under these afflictions. They are not joyous, but grievous; and only yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those that are *exercised thereby.* He is no more to despise the chastening of the Lord than to faint when he is rebuked of him. In some respects he feels these troubles more than others: for he cannot have recourse to the diversions and stupefactions of the world under them; he sees in them all the dreadful evil of sin; he often fears they are proofs of God's anger towards him; and trembles lest they should not be sanctified.

There are also the hatred and opposition of the world. What did the Maccabean Jews, and the first Christians, and our own forefathers suffer? We do well to remember the former times, and compare them with our own. Yet what cannot be done legally may be done really; and many wives, children, servants, and dependants, are at this hour enduring persecution, even in this country. The strongest ties of affection towards a man will upon conversion, relax and loosen, like the cords of life at the breaking up of the constitution; and what was warm friendship before, degenerates into mere civility, perhaps into open malignity. The carnal mind is enmity against God; the tongue can no man tame They that go forth to the Redeemer without the camp must bear his reproach. The people of the world will never act justly and candidly towards real religion. They always affect to pity or despise it. It is weakness, or derangement, or enthusiasm, or mercenariness, or hypocrisy. "Speaking evil of you" —"Cruel mockings—"

There are also grievous temptations. What do *some* suffer from this quarter! Yet each Christian, as knowing only his own heart's bitterness, is ready to exclaim, "No one endures such temptations as *I* do—They not only attend me in the world, but follow me to the throne of God and the table of the Lord—They often lay waste my comfort, and I fear will prove my destruction at last—"The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead." Yet is not the Christian life always spoken of as a warfare? And did not even Paul and his fellows say, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

But there is nothing with which the Christian is so much oppressed as his sins. "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear"—At first in the guilt of them, till by believing he enters into rest—But afterwards and always, in the remains of them. When I would do good, says he, evil is present with me, and how to perform that which is good I find not; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death! He is a stranger to Divine grace whose imperfections are not his afflictions. The Christian mourns even over those infirmities which are not even viewed by others as sins: such as wandering thoughts and cold affections in duty. He has a renewed and tender conscience, and like the apple of the eye, a mote will pain it. To love purity and feel pollution—to be eager to advance, and be hindered by baffling detentions—to wish to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, and never be able to put any thing out of his hand that is not marred and spoiled—to love the Saviour, and yet grieve his holy Spirit,

and pierce the very bosom on which he leans —Here is enough to make him groan, being burdened. It is said of that beautiful bird, the bird of paradise, that when it is caught and caged, it never ceases to sigh till it is set free. "Just such is the Christian"—Nothing will satisfy him but the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

NOVEMBER 8.

"*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*"—Deut. xxxiii. 27.

How various and striking are the representations which God has given of himself in his Word! They all correspond with the state and wants of his people; and are adapted and designed to fill them with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Here we are told that he is their *Defender* and their *Supporter*—

"The eternal God is *thy refuge*." A refuge reminds us of exposure. Dangers encompass them on every side. Their enemies are numberless, and according to the Apostle, the greatest of them are not visible: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." They cannot stand of themselves; and creatures also, however disposed and powerful, are unable to secure them. But their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. He is not only their protector, but their protection. It is only in his covenant engagements, and perfections, and presence, and providence, that they can realize their safety. But encouraging themselves in the Lord their God, they may be emboldened into confidence, and even triumph, and say with the Apostle, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And this is the interest that awakens their chief anxiety. While they are here, their outward concerns have their claims; but "one thing is needful." Temporal comforts, as far as they are good for us, are secured: but these may be injured and destroyed; not because God is not able to preserve them, but because he is wise, and knows that these are cases in which the loss of them will be more profitable than the possession. But spiritual blessings are the "sure mercies of David." Whatever becomes of the trader, the Christian is secure. The outward man may perish, but the inward man shall be renewed day by day. "I give unto them," says the Saviour, "eternal life; and they shall never perish."

—"And *underneath* are the everlasting *arms*." Are his people then children? The mother upholds the helpless babe. Sometimes the knee bears the pleasing load; but when she would press it to her bosom, or convey it sleeping to the bed of repose, her arms softly sustain it. "And as one whom his mother comforteth," saith God, "so will I comfort you, and ye shall *be* comforted." Are they invalids? How soon is the strength of the patient reduced, and another is required to raise and remove him from posture to posture, and from place to place. And thus "he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Are they heavy-laden? Sin is a burden too heavy for them to bear. The guilt of it often bows down their spirits; and the remains of it constrain them to complain, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They frequently feel a load of cares, and wants, and crosses, and griefs. "Lord," say they, "I am oppressed, undertake for me." And the promise says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." And thus it has always been. They have frequently looked forward with dread and despondence; but when the afflictions arrived, they found grace to help in time of need; and as their days so was their strength. Yea, they were not only supported, but in the multitude of their thoughts within them, his comforts delighted their souls.

There is one individual to whom this will peculiarly apply. It is you, O aged believer. The evil days are now come, in which you have little pleasure from outward things. Many of your connexions have fallen off, one after another, like leaves in autumn. Lover and friend have been removed from you and your acquaintance into darkness. Your memory is unfaithful. Your senses begin to fail. The eye and the ear are becoming dim of seeing and dull of hearing. The limbs decline: the hands and the knees tremble. Fear is in the way. The grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. But while you cry, "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth," he who has borne you from the belly, and carried you from the womb, says, "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

NOVEMBER 9

"*And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*"—Luke xv. 5.

Jesus is the speaker, and he refers to himself. The allusion is metaphorical, and regards him under one of the most endearing characters he sustains—The Shepherd.

The address was occasioned by the nature of his audience, and the insinuation of his enemies. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"—Drunkards, adulterers, swearers, liars, Sabbath-breakers. The proverb says, Like begets like; and there is much truth in the old adage. Show me a man's company, and I will show you his character. Accordingly, "the Pharisees and the Scribes," pious souls! as if alarmed for the interests of morality, and pretending that the freedom of his conduct was incompatible with the sanctity that should distinguish a Teacher sent from God, "murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The apparent difficulty was to be solved by an easy distinction which they were not prepared or disposed to make. Our Lord was among these sinners not because he loved their sins, but would save their souls; or, as he explained himself on a similar reproach, he was among them as a physician walks the wards of an hospital, not because he is charmed with disease, but in order to prescribe for his patients: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Here he has another equally striking justification. He spake this parable unto them, saying, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it"—he belabours it with his rod till it pants again? No such thing—"he layeth it on his shoulders"—complaining of the dangers he has incurred, the many weary steps he has taken, the sufferings he has endured in the research? No—but "REJOICING." Blessed Jesus, how well couldst thou say, "I am the good Shepherd!"

He not only seeks and saves—but whatever it may cost him, he does it with joy. In the anticipation of it, he "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." When he was actually become incarnate, he said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart." With regard to his obtaining eternal redemption for us by his blood, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" See him at the well of Sychar. The disciples had left him hungry, and had gone away into the city to buy meat. But when they returned and spread the entertainment before him, and said, "Master, eat;" he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He refers to the pleasure he had just experienced in the conversion of the woman of Samaria, and in the approaching salvation of her neighbours by her means —This was his repast: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."—"He layeth it on his shoulders, REJOICING."

It is the joy of *success*. Nothing is more mortifying than to labour in vain, especially when we take great pains, and make great sacrifices. But how pleasing and delightful is it to see the fruit of our exertions! How delighted is the soldier after his marchings, privations, hardships, conflicts, and wounds, to retire in peace, and share the spoils of victory and the applause of his king and his country! "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." And this is the very image the prophet applies to the Messiah: "He shall see his seed." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Paul and his companions call the Thessalonians their "glory and joy." Yet they were only ministers by whom they believed. If converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their conversion, how much more are they the glory and joy of him who is the author of it!

It is the joy of *benevolence*. No pleasure is so unselfish; so pure; so blissful in prospect, and in review, as the pleasure of doing good. But this pleasure will always be in proportion to the degree of benevolent disposition in the benefactor. Who then can imagine the measure of delight in the communication of his favours *He* must enjoy, "whose heart is made of tenderness," who, when he was rich for our sakes became poor, and died that we might live? O that we were as willing to be blessed as he is to deliver and to indulge us! Then the giver and the receiver would rejoice together.

The joy is *encouraging*. The awakened and convinced sinner feels his need of strong consolation. But why should he despond? Why should he ask, Will he receive me if I apply to him? Does not the Saviour command him to look? Does he not invite him to come? Does he not complain that he will not come? And does not his application afford him pleasure? In pleading with you therefore, O sinner, we have to urge *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have long enough dishonoured him, and grieved his holy Spirit. Surely now you ought to delight him; and there is one thing by which you may be sure to do it. Retire with weeping and supplication to his footstool; and cry, Lord, save, I perish; and thy sorrows and sighs will yield him as much satisfaction as the songs of angels—"The prayer of the upright is his delight."

The joy is *exemplary*. As Christians we must not only depend upon him, but resemble him: not only glory in his cross, but tread in his steps. We are commanded to walk in

love as Christ also hath loved us: and are assured that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Let therefore his grief be our grief: let his joy be our joy: and let his joy be fulfilled in us. Let us spare no exertions, let us grudge no sacrifices in our concern to save sinners. Let the work be its own reward. Let the very doing of it be our pleasure. It is what he himself enjoins and expects. "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." The persons intended are angels and saints. The former readily comply: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." And can the latter refuse? *They* who have themselves been recovered and restored? *They* who have known the misery of sin, and the joy of his salvation? Can *they* see the grace of God and not be glad?

NOVEMBER 10.

"*Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.*" 1 Peter ii. 7.

YET there are many to whom he is not precious who yet believe, and would be offended if they were called infidels. Peter cannot therefore refer to every kind of belief. There is a faith which is without works, and dead, being alone. But the "faith of God" is operative. It "worketh by love;" and especially love to the Saviour.

When we consider how much depends upon faith; that it is the principle of all genuine religion; that it is the medium of our justification; that we are saved through faith; and that by faith we live and walk; it must be of great importance to know whether we are the subjects of it: and accordingly we are commanded to "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith." And here we are furnished with one of the most pleasing and convincing evidences of the fact. It is the endearment of the Lord Jesus. Is he in our view fairer than the children of men? Is he altogether lovely? all our salvation and all our desire? our glory and our joy? He is so to them that believe—To them "that believe he is precious."

But if this preciousness be the evidence of faith, it is no less the consequence of it. The saints in light do not require faith to endear him. They no longer walk by faith, but by sight. Ah! ye spirits of just men made perfect, in whose number we now reckon many of our own connexions, you see him as he is, and are satisfied by beholding his face in righteousness! But if he is made precious to us in this world, it must be by faith. For, first, it is by faith that we gain our information concerning him. We cannot love him without knowing him: but it is faith alone that reveals him to the mind, and tells us where he is, and what he is, and what he possesses, and what he has done, and suffered, and promised. And, secondly, it is only by faith we can, when he is known, make use of him for all the purposes he is ordained to accomplish. He is the refuge, and he is the food of the soul: but a refuge cannot secure us unless it be entered; and food cannot nourish us, unless it be eaten; but this application to him, and of him, is the work of faith. It is not a mere notion, but an actual experience, that attaches the Christian to Christ. He has "received him," and received him "full of grace and truth." He has found him infinitely suited to all his wants, and adequate to his relief. Yea, he has healed his broken heart, he has calmed his troubled conscience, he has made him free indeed, he has given him boldness and access with confidence into the holiest of all. And he does not need to be told that all this is the effect of believing on the name of the only begotten Son of God. Thirdly, without faith we have no complacency in him. We cannot esteem and rejoice in any thing unless we feel some congeniality with it. "They that are after the flesh do mind," that is, love, savour, and relish, "the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." And to "be spiritually minded is life and peace." Christ is a holy, spiritual, heavenly Saviour. He was named Jesus because he was to save his people from their sins: and he gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. A natural man therefore can have no delight in him or communion with him; "for what communion hath light with darkness, or what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" But to a believer he is precious because he has this principle of conformity. He has the Spirit of Christ; and he received this Spirit not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith. His heart is purified; and the heart is purified by faith. He is sanctified, and we are sanctified by faith that is in him.

It follows from the admission of this truth that the reason why he is not more precious, is because of our remaining unbelief. Wherefore let us "pray always that our God would count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and we in him."

NOVEMBER 11.

"*He is precious.*"—1 Peter ii. 7.

WE have seen to whom he is precious. "To them that believe." Let us now ask

what proofs do they give of this preciousness? And in what seasons do they peculiarly realize the force of it?

In evidence of this preciousness, see how he fills their minds. To the miser his money is precious, and therefore his mind dwells upon it: the child is precious to the mother, and therefore she cannot forget it—So the believer thinks of Jesus, and his thoughts of him are frequent and pleasant. "My meditation of him shall be sweet. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God, how great is the sum of them—when I awake I am still with thee!" See how he employs his tongue. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The impressions made upon our feelings by an object pre-eminently dear and interesting, can hardly be restrained. When the Pharisees desired our Lord to silence the multitude who were acclaiming him in the temple; he answered, "If these should hold their peace the stones would cry out." And when Peter and John were ordered by the council to speak no more in the name of Jesus; they replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." David therefore says, "My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof." And he could equally reckon upon the disposition of others: "Thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom." See also what sacrifices they are willing to make for him. For him, says Paul, I have suffered the loss of all things. The noble army of martyrs followed him to prison and to death. There is the same spirit in believers now, and they evince it as far as opportunity allows. They go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For his sake they endure the sneers of neighbours, the frowns of friends, the menaces of superiors. For his sake they give up the world; and all their sins, though dear as a right eye, or profitable as a right hand; yea, and forsake all that they have, as far as it comes in competition with him. Their regard appears too in their valuing every thing in relation to him. They are never so pleased with the works of nature as when they are emblems of his beauty and glory. They are never so delighted with ordinances as when they are mediums of communion with him. The Bible is most precious, as it is the word of Christ, and testifies of him. Heaven is most attractive as a place in which they shall be with him to behold his glory. No cause interests them like his. Their very souls are identified with it. They are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it is their burden: while no news equals the success of his affairs, and the increase of his empire. In a word, he is so dear and essential to them, that nothing can be a substitute for him on earth or in heaven; while he can be a substitute for any thing—for every thing: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Thus he is always undeniably precious to them that believe: yet there are seasons in which they peculiarly feel the force of it. Such is the day of effectual calling. If ever food is relished, it is when we are hungry. If ever we prize the physician, it is when we are sick, and long for health and cure. Our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit, to convince us of sin, and to glorify himself: and the former is necessary to the latter. When we see our true character and condition as sinners, then the proud looks are humbled, and the lofty looks are laid low, and the Lord alone is exalted.

Such is the Sabbath. It is named in honour of him "the Lord's day." It is to bring him to our remembrance as rising from the dead, and entering into his rest after finishing the work that was given him to do. His people hold some communion with him through the week: but week days are always in a degree worldly days. They have some glimpses of him, and some words from him, in pressing through their ordinary concerns. But they want larger and more intimate intercourse with their best friend. And when the Sabbath comes they take him to their retirement, and he manifests himself to them. And they go to his own house, where they see his power and glory in the sanctuary, and praise him with joyful lips.

Such is the period of holy fellowship at his table. In reference to this, where is the believer who has not been able to say, I sat under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste? In no other duty have we such views of him as here. We see him in the very act of dying for us. He is evidently set forth crucified among us. As a risen Saviour he comes and shows us his hands and his feet, and assures us that because he lives we shall live also.

Such is the day of trouble. A friend is born for adversity, and endeared by the time of need; but many who wear the name are then found to withdraw themselves. But he comes near—and must come near if his word can be trusted—"I will be with thee in trouble." He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all our affliction he is afflicted. Human friendship, when sincere and lively, is limited. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can comfort us in all our tribulation; and turn the shadow of death into the morning.

Such is a dying day. The day of trouble may come, the day of death will come; and if it does not bring Christ with it!—But if he is with us when heart and flesh fail; if we can by faith view Jesus as having put away our sin by the sacrifice of himself, as going to prepare a place for us, and as coming again to receive us to himself, that where he is there we may be also; this will turn the chamber of sickness into the house of God and the gate of heaven—we shall be joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon our beds—

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms;
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms.

'Then, while ye hear my heartstrings break,
How sweet my moments roll!
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul."

NOVEMBER 12.

"*Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*"—Job xxiii. 8, 9.

Some have considered this allusively, and exemplified it thus—I go "forward;" forward to the promises. These abound in the Scriptures, are adapted to all our wants, and provide for a great while to come; and there was a time when I could claim them as my own, and plead them in prayer, and make them my songs in the house of my pilgrimage: now they seem only the property of others, and if they are not wells without water, they seem as springs shut up, and fountains sealed to me—I go "forward, but he is not there."—I go "backward;" backward to experience. I once thought that I had been convinced of sin, that I had trembled at his word, that I had rejoiced in his salvation, that my fellowship had been with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: now my former views and feelings, my distresses and my comforts, and which I had supposed to be spiritual and divine, appear suspicious, and I fear I have no part or lot in the matter; and that my heart has never been right in the sight of God—I go "backward, but I cannot perceive him." I turn to "the left hand, where he doth work, and survey the operations of nature." These are his inferior doings, but they are the produce of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and all his works praise him. And there was a time when in the field, the meadow, the garden, I walked with God. I saw *his* sun rising upon the evil and the good, and *his* rain coming down, and *his* paths dropping fatness. Every thing seemed full of God. Yea, I saw my Redeemer in the rose and in the lily, and said, As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons: now creation seems a kind of blank—"I cannot behold him."—I turn "to the right hand," among his nobler works of grace. I think of the glories of redemption, the operations of his Holy Spirit; I mingle with his people in the sanctuary, I repair to the table of my dying Lord—"But he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

Now all this is true in itself, and many a reader perhaps may be able to make it his own. But evangelical spiritualizers have not a little injured the Scripture, by giving it meanings which are not its own. What is true in doctrine is not always true in the text, from which, by force or artifice, it is derived. A preacher is bound, however he may use it as an allusion or illustration, to inculcate the true and real import of every passage. Therefore we observe that Job here, by a fullness of phrascology, would express his ignorance and perplexity with regard to God's present dispositions and dispensations towards him: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

God may withdraw from his people; not indeed entirely. This would be inconsistent with his engagements; and were he *thus* to depart from them, they would relapse into a state of nature, and sin have again dominion: but he may so withdraw himself as to elude their views and apprehensions. He may conceal from them the manifestations of his special favour; they may not see his smiles as before; he may seem to be an enemy, while yet he is their best friend; like Joseph, who made himself strange, and behaved himself roughly to his brethren, to humble them, and bring their sin to remembrance, while his bowels yearned within him, and he sought where to weep. And this applies much to his providential dealings with them: these are frequently so trying and mysterious, that they are unable to find out his meaning and design. He even derives a character from hence; "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." And when we consider the vastness of his understanding, and the littleness of our own, is it wonderful that in many of his proceedings he should be far above out of our sight! and that requiring us to trust him instead of tracing him, he should often say, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter?" We now see only the beginnings, not the end: we only see parts, not the whole; and of these parts we see not the relations and the bearings; and the little we do see we see through crevices and in fogs.

We may however remark, that much of the difficulty of Providence results from our selfish and worldly feelings. We do not think Providence mysterious when we have all

things and abound. We never heard Christians expressing surprise or perplexity when they had ease, and health, and business, and agreeable connexions—all is plain enough then: but as soon as the scene changes, and trials befall them, "his way is in the sea, and his path in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known!" Yea, they do not think the conduct of God so incomprehensible, when losses and afflictions befall others. They can go to them, and say, All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth; he hath done all things well; as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens—But when these good talkers about afflictions become the subjects of them, how frequently do they draw upon themselves the remark, "Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled!"

Many things too would no longer remain incomprehensible or *unaccountable*, if persons were willing to censure themselves; for the things which *confound* them are only the natural consequences of their own misconduct. "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." If persons eat freely, and lie late in bed, and take no exercise, ask a physician what right they have to complain of low spirits and ill health. If God, who knoweth our frame, has forbidden the widow to marry unless in the Lord, and disregarding his judgment she yokes herself to an unbeliever, and is deprived of her religious freedom: if he has assured us that to walk surely is to walk uprightly, and by fleshly wisdom we have our conversation in the world: if he commands us to cease from man, and we will make flesh our arm;—Why should we wonder at the results which he foresaw and foretold? Having sown tares, why should we think it strange that we do not reap wheat? Or marvel that we cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? All would be as plain as the day, were we to say, "I have erred."

We frequently expect too much from Providence. We wish it to act preternaturally, instead of conforming to its established laws and rules. We seem to rely upon it not only to assist us in our difficulties, but to countenance us in our mistakes; to free us from responsibility when we act freely; and to afford us impunity in imprudence. But if he places us in the way, and clearly directs our goings, and tells us to look straight on, and to ponder our steps; and we close our eyes in raptures, or fix them among the stars in speculation; is God's providence to be accused because an angel does not come to keep us from striking against a stumbling-block, or falling into the ditch? And are we to lie bruised or bemired, complaining that clouds and darkness are round about *him*—instead of crying, "I have sinned; what shall be done unto thee, O thou Preserver of men!"

But see the temper of Job while in this trying condition. He is restless; he is after God in every direction—No quarter is unexplored: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." The righteous are "the generation of them that seek him." But they do *not* seek him whose "strength is to sit still." *Their* wishes are "the desire of the slothful which killeth him because his hands refuse to labour." Our disposition is to be judged of by our exertions and our sacrifices. A good man may be at a loss for God, but he cannot be satisfied without him. He loves him, he needs him, he has tasted that he is gracious; and therefore when God hides his face from him he is troubled. For he is always enjoying God or searching after him. The latter is as much a proof of grace as the former: yea, many who are now holding communion with him have less powerful desires than some who are lamenting after him.

NOVEMBER 13.

"*Cast thy burden upon the Lord.*"—Psalm lv. 22.

All men are not exercised in the same way, but every one has something trying and oppressive in his condition that may be called *his* burden. And we may make one remark concerning this universal experience—We are commonly prone to reduce the burdens of others, but to magnify our own. Each sufferer is ready to say, "Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow." But this is the language of ignorance as well as of self-importance. How little do we know what thousands of our fellow-creatures endure! Indeed no one can judge perfectly concerning the burden of another. For the whole of that burden, which may seem inconsiderable to you, is never known, and often a small part of it only appears. The weight too is relative: a burden which a strong man can carry would crush an infant or an invalid. It may be also increased by imagination, in which case, though there may be only fancy in the fact, there is reality enough in the feeling—"The heart only knoweth his own bitterness."

But if all are not equally unhappy, all have somewhat that bears upon the mind: "Full bliss is bliss Divine." And if the question was addressed to a number of persons individually, What is *thy* burden? One would answer, My burden is made up of care and anxiety. An event is before me that perplexes me by day, and holds my eyes waking

by night. It is a movement in life. I know how much depends on a wrong step, and I wish to be found in the path of duty: but when I would determine, I seem equally poised by claims and difficulties on either side, and I know not the way I should take. Another would say, My burden is made up of malignity and calumny. I wish not only to approve myself unto God, but to stand fair with my fellow-men: yet they misrepresent my motives, and vilify my actions, and cast out my name as evil—And if all manner of evil is spoken of you falsely, it is the very thing your Saviour told you to look for; and the same affliction has befallen your brethren who were before you in the world. Yet we wonder not that you feel. The Apostle throws in "cruel mockings" among the severest sufferings of martyrdom; and the Saviour said, "Reproach hath broken my heart."—A third says, My burden is outward trouble; disappointments, losses, and embarrassments in my worldly substance and circumstances. My purposes are broken off, my schemes and dependences have failed,

> "And day by day some current's thwarting force
> Sets me more distant from a prosperous course"—

I wish to provide things honest in the sight of all men, but with growing demands I have diminished resources, and often look at the state of my family, and ask, "What shall they eat, and what shall they drink, and wherewithal shall they be clothed?"—A fourth says, My burden is bereavement. How have I been stripped and peeled! I had a child, I had a parent, I had a friend who was as my own soul, I had a companion with whom I took sweet counsel. Now I sit alone, and am as a sparrow upon the house-top. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.—Another says, My complaint is bodily indisposition; disease threatens me, infirmity weakens me, shattered nerves and broken spirits often deprive me of the privileges of the sanctuary, and discolour as the medium all my views even of Divine things.—Another says, My age is labour and sorrow. The days are come of fading eyes, and ears dull of hearing, and trembling limbs; fears are in the way; the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.

> "My vitals, with laborious strife,
> Bear up the crazy load;
> And drag the dull remains of life,
> Along the tiresome road."

Another says, I could bear every thing else if all was clear, and calm, and inviting at the end—But there is death—at the sight of which my peace flies, and my comforts are embittered. O how shall I ever meet the king of terrors! Ye departed saints! you have passed the event; death is behind you; but it is before me, and it is ever before me. I hear some talk of their departure with confidence and joy; but I am always subject to bondage through fear of death—

Well, I want not to hear what constitutes thy particular burden—Be it what it may, "Cast," says David, "thy burden upon the Lord"—Not upon creatures, not upon good men, not upon ministers. It is true, in a sense we are all to be burden-bearers: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And "a friend is born for adversity." But when wanted he is not always to be found. And he may not enter into your views and feelings. And if his sympathy be kind, it may not be efficient. He may pity, but be unable to relieve. Men at their best estate are nothing without God. Cease, therefore, from them, and say with the Church, "Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me."

"But how can I cast my burden upon the Lord?" By faith. When you believe that he can be found, that he is near, that he is a very present help in trouble, that the very hairs of your head are all numbered, that all your ways are before him, that he is pacified towards you by the blood of the Cross, that he who spared not his own Son will also freely give you all things, that he invites you to come and put your trust under the shadow of his wings, that he careth for you, and will make all things work together for your good; then the spirit is freed, relieved, composed; and the promise is accomplished—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee." It is also done by prayer. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Prayer is therefore not only a duty, but a privilege. It is good for us to draw near to God. It not only relieves us by diverting our sorrow, but by soothing and reducing it. Prayer opens the heart, and lets out grief; and opens heaven, and lets down grace. It succours us not only by its exercise, but by its success. God answers prayer by acting for us and in us. To deny this is to explain away the constant and express language of the Scripture—But we must enter into the spirit of prayer. If we pray carelessly and formally, the burden will remain still pressing us down. Hannah was full of anguish, and prayed, but "she prayed in her heart." And what was the result? "When she had poured out her soul before the Lord, she went her way, and did eat and drink, and her countenance was no more sad."

Some have not yet found their way to this

relief in their trouble; but the Church says, "A glorious high throne from the beginning has been the place of our sanctuary"—

> "And who that knows the worth of prayer
> But wishes to be often there?"

NOVEMBER 14.

"*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*"—John vi. 53.

This language gave great offence when our Lord delivered it. Many of his disciples said, "It is an hard saying, who can hear it?" We need not wonder therefore if it should be disrelished by some now. It certainly requires some explanation, for it has given rise to several abuses or mistakes. We may remark two of these. The first takes it in a sense too gross. It is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which has rolled down from age to age in blood. According to this, it is believed that the words, "This is my body; and this is my blood," do not mean emblems of them, but the things themselves; and that as soon as the bread and the wine have been consecrated by the priest, they are changed into the very body and blood of Christ, and that he is thus eaten, and may be eaten by thousands at the same time! In the same way they may as easily prove that he consists of boards and nails, for he says, "I am the door." What a strong delusion to believe a lie is here! Be it observed, our Lord has here no reference at all to the Sacrament, for this was not instituted till long after. Besides, the participation of his flesh and blood, of which he speaks, is inseparable from salvation—"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." But are all saved who partake of the Lord's supper? And do all perish who never received it? The second takes it in a manner too refined, and is derived from the enemies of evangelical truth, who have always shown a peculiar aversion to the death of Christ under any other notion than that of an example or witness. They tell us the diction is very strong, and must be much qualified. Our Lord, say they, is here speaking of himself as a teacher, and refers to the design of his doctrine; for knowledge has always been considered as the food of the mind. This is readily allowed. Yet what teacher ever said to his pupils, You must eat not my instructions, but myself; not my lessons, but my flesh and blood? The language is certainly very metaphorical; but it is founded in truth, and designed to convey an important reality. The thing is, we live not by the life of things, but their death. It is so with vegetables, and birds, and fishes, and beasts; they serve to nourish us by their death. We live spiritually by the dying of the Lord Jesus; and the allusion refers to his mediatorial offering for our sins; and teaches us, that faith is necessary to our deriving benefit from his sacrifice—"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

For this eating and drinking represent our believing on Christ. The resemblance between these and the exercise of faith appears in four things. There is in each of them *appetite*. Our Saviour speaks of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Hunger and thirst are natural, powerful, returning appetites. Such are the desires which all believers feel towards the Lord Jesus. There is in each of them *application*. A man may hear of food, see it, hold it in his hand, present it to his lips; but this is not eating. In eating there is an actual reception of the food into the animal system. And in believing we receive Christ Jesus the Lord. His suitableness and all-sufficiency to our case are made known in the Gospel, and all the blessings of his salvation are brought nigh; but still we perish unless we are made partakers of Christ. How often does the old and good divinity tell us, that an unapplied Saviour is a nonentity to us! In each case there is *satisfaction*. Medicine may be necessary, but we are not said to eat medicine—we take physic; but we eat meat because there is pleasure in it. Food is essential to our subsistence; yet when we sit down to a well-spread table, we never perform it as a duty to save us from death—There is immediate gratification in the action, and this secures the performance. The reception of Christ is not only indispensable, but free and delightful. Like Zaccheus, we receive him joyfully. We not only submit to the method of his grace, but we acquiesce, we glory in it. We love his salvation. We rejoice in his name. In each there is *nourishment*. This is the design and effect of food. It is thus the child grows; it is thus the man is sustained, and rendered equal to his labour. And "the just shall live by faith." "The life that I live in the flesh," says Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Every image applied to the Redeemer fails to do him justice. We say there is no subsisting without food; yet Moses and Elijah lived forty days and forty nights without eating. But to live for a moment spiritually, without Christ, is a miracle that never has been, and never can be accomplished. Food, though necessary to life, is not sufficient to preserve it. This was the case even with what is called "angels' food," and "meat from heaven." "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Blessed Jesus! thy flesh is meat indeed, and thy blood is drink indeed! Evermore give us this food

NOVEMBER 15.

"*Nevertheless, let us go unto him.*"—John xi. 15.

He is never too confident in his resources, nor too late in his movements. We are often mistaken with regard to our wishes and designs. We raise expectations which we cannot realize; and begin enterprises which we are unable to finish. Among men some are strong and some are weak; but the difference between them is only comparative. The one may break a larger rod than another; but when you bring them to the mast of a ship, they are perfectly upon a level. But he who speaks in righteousness is mighty to save—"He is able to save unto the uttermost." Therefore he says—

"Nevertheless, let us go unto him"—Not to *them*, but to *him*—Not to the sisters, but to the brother—Not to Martha and Mary, but to Lazarus. "To what purpose? Lazarus is dead. It is now too late." It would be too late for you; but not for me. Your extremity is my opportunity. I turn the shadow of death into the morning, and can do more than you are able to ask or think. I surprise as well as succour; and love to arrive at the place of difficulty when creatures are all withdrawn, having said, Help is not in us.

"Nevertheless, let us go unto him"—"But he is not only dead, but buried; and has lain in the grave four days." Can the dead praise thee? Can they who go down into the pit hope for thy truth?—What! visit a corpse in a state of putrefaction!—He cannot receive thee, see thee, hear thee. But he can hear, and see, and receive *me*. Let us try what an interview will produce between death and the grave, and the resurrection and the life.

And did he go in vain! We can visit the "long home" of a friend. We can go to the grave to weep there; but were we to attempt to open an intercourse with the inhabitant, we should be laughed to scorn. But Jesus said, Lazarus, come forth; and in a moment his lungs heaved, his blood liquefied and flowed again, and he came forth in newness of life! What a journey, what a character was here! Had you met him in his way to Bethany, you would, in appearance, only have seen a man like ourselves. But had one of the disciples stepped back, as soon as he had passed, and said, There is Jesus of Nazareth; he is going to visit a man in his tomb; and could he have informed you of the result, would you not have followed him? Wherever I see him going I will go with him. The journey will be for his honour, and my profit—He cannot move in vain—Nothing is too hard for the Lord. When the Egyptians were pressing upon them, and the Red sea was before them, he said, "Go forward." What, into the deep? Yes, into the deep. To be drowned? No, but to go through dry-shod. They were to obey: he was to open the passage. In the first creation "he spake, and it was done." And in the second "he calleth things that are not as though they were."

Let us never despond, but trust in him. Let his all-sufficiency encourage us with regard to others. Let those who in doing good meet with unlikely materials to work upon; let ministers who seem only preaching many of their hearers into impenitence; let parents whose hearts are bleeding over ungodly children, think of him who was taking this seemingly useless journey, and never abandon their endeavours or hope. Let them use means in *his* name; and by faith and prayer bring *him* forward—He can make these dry bones live—The Son quickeneth whom he will. And let it encourage us with regard to ourselves. Am I a sinner? I ought to feel that my case is bad; but it is not desperate. Hopeless indeed it is as to myself and all creatures; but in him is my help found. He can say to the prisoners, Go forth. He can make the blind to see, and the deaf to hear—He can make all things new. Am I a Christian? Let me bring my confidence, in every exigency and difficulty, to his power, and say, with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." "Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

But, says one, "My wound is incurable—He will not go to the grave of my departed hope." If he keeps away, it is not because he is unable to reanimate thy dead, and give back the dear treasure to thine arms; but because his power is under the direction of his wisdom; yea, and of his righteousness and kindness too. But the truth is, that he will visit the interesting spot—Thy brother, thy mother, thy child shall rise again. The period is coming when he will look down, and say to his mighty angels, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."—And, lo! he descends, and the dead arise, and you embrace to part no more. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

NOVEMBER 16.

"*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*"—Heb. ii. 18.

There can be no question of whom these words are spoken. Let my thoughts commune with him as the sufferer and the succourer.

He himself suffered, being *tempted*. Then a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. In this sense the Lord Jesus was not tempted, neither indeed could be, for he "was the holy One of God." We are tempted when we are solicited to sin.

Hence Satan is called the tempter: and thus by him our Saviour was tempted to unbelief, presumption, and idolatry. But the word temptation does not always or principally in the Scripture signify attempts to draw into sin. God is said to tempt Abraham; and we read that we are to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations; and that if needs be we are in heaviness through manifold temptations. Here, and in many other places, the word means afflictions. These are called temptations because they are designed and adapted to try us—to prove our principles and dispositions—to evince the reality and the degree of our grace to ourselves and others. His being tempted, therefore, means his being subject to all the distress, pain, and anguish, which characterized him a man of sorrows, and justified his saying, Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

But he *suffered*, being tempted. This attests the impression made upon him by what he endured; and shows us two things—That his divinity did not absorb his human nature, so as to render it incapable of passion: and—That as man, his patience was not a physical apathy, or a philosophical insensibility. There is no patience in bearing what we do not feel: and no resignation in giving up what we do not love and value—as there would be no virtue in fasting if we had no appetite for food. Our Lord, instead of being less susceptible of suffering than others, was more so. That which adds to the impression of pain, is the delicate and fine crasis and constitution of the part aggrieved. The composition of our Saviour's body perfectly fitted it to receive the most quick and sensible touches of every object. And the same may be said of his mind. A being dull and stupid feels much less suffering than a man of lively conception and reflection: in the one case pain falls upon a log of wood; in the other upon the apple of the eye. Jesus groaned in spirit: wept: made supplications with strong cryings and tears; was sore amazed, and very heavy; his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground—But the sufferer

Is also the *succourer*. The one is the consequence of the other. "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." This ability therefore is relative and acquired. He was made perfect through suffering; and in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted, by way of atonement, by way of example, by way of sympathy, by way of efficiency. Able

By way of atonement. And is it a light thing to know, in our deepest sufferings, that we are enduring nothing that is penal? That Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us? That every affliction is only the stroke of a fatherly rod, chastising us for our profit? That we are accepted in the Beloved? That we can never come into condemnation? Able

By way of example. We are naturally like bullocks, unaccustomed to the yoke; and even after some degrees of religious experience, we know little of the holy art of "suffering affliction, and of patience." But Jesus "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." And as in him we see what disposition we should exercise towards men, who are the instruments of our distress, so we learn also how we are to submit to God, who is the author of it: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me—nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." One thing is of great importance here. In his conduct we see that we are never to go aside either to *meet* or—to *miss* our cross; but when we find it in our way, to take it up, and follow him. Able

By way of sympathy. We may compassionate a sufferer, but we cannot properly sympathize with him, unless we have been through the same. Now he was in all things made like unto his brethren; and he remembers how he felt, and what he desired and required when in our condition. He knows the poverty of his people much better than by report: he was poor. He knows the effect of slander: "reproach," says he, "has broken my heart."

> "He knows what sore temptations mean,
> For he has felt the same."

He knows what it is to die, and to enter the darkness of the grave. Able

By way of efficiency. Pity is not power. Many can sympathize with their connexions who have not the means of relief and redress. The ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; yet the hand is shortened that it cannot save. But he is mighty to save. He is able to save unto the uttermost. He can always support, deliver, sanctify. He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. He can turn the curse into a blessing. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. But this efficiency is the consequence of his suffering—"for the suffering of death—he is crowned with glory and honour"—all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Well may he be called "the consolation of Israel!" Let us say of him as Lamech did of Noah, "This same shall comfort us."

Let us also be concerned to resemble him. Let us be tender-hearted, and concerned to comfort them that are cast down. We cannot do much; but let us do what we can; and be little images of him who is the shadow of

a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of water in a dry place. What is most admirable in us is not our wealth, or splendour, or even talents, but those feelings which render us pitiful and courteous; humane and *divine*. And these sentiments are best learned in the school of affliction. This is one of the motives that should reconcile us to our trials. We are not detached and unrelated individuals, but parts of a whole whose welfare should be dear to us—and in that we suffer, being tempted, we are able to succour them that are tempted.

NOVEMBER 17

"*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*"—Matt. x. 32.

Let us see what this promise requires of us in a way of DUTY. It is confession; "Whosoever *confesseth* me before men." Three inquiries will serve to explain it.

First—*Who* is to be confessed? "He that confesseth *me*," says the Saviour. Him therefore we are to confess in his being, person, character, offices, relations; in his sufferings and glory; in his cause, ministers, and members; in every thing that concerns him as he is revealed to us in the Scripture. Only it is necessary to observe, that as the opposition to him is often varying, so the duty of his confessors will vary accordingly; and the truth we are peculiarly required to witness must be determined by the nature and exigency of the call. The Apostle speaks of being "established in the present truth;" by which we are to understand some doctrine particularly opposed or neglected, and the confirmation and recommendation of which is more immediately called for. According, therefore, to the seasons and places in which we live, we shall have to testify sometimes in favour of his divinity and atonement, sometimes against self-righteousness, sometimes against superstition, sometimes against enthusiasm and fanaticism, sometimes against Antinomianism, and often, very often, against a mere form of knowledge or godliness, without the power thereof.

Secondly—*Before* whom are we to confess him? "He that confesseth me *before men*." What men? Godly men only? It is an easy thing to confess him before his admirers—But we are to confess him before bad men, before his enemies as well as friends. Before the poor and the vulgar only by whom we are little influenced? Nay: but before the rich, the great—"I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed." Before the ignorant and illiterate only? No: but before the sons of learning and of science, who may pity or ridicule our want of understanding. Before those only who know us, and who would despise us for denying what we profess? No: but before those who are strangers to us, and cannot be aware of our inconsistency.

Thirdly—*How* are we to confess him before men? The source of the confession is faith; as it is written, "I believed, therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." If our testimony does not harmonize with our convictions and sentiments, it is worse than nothing, it is hypocrisy and lies. But though the spring be within, the stream is without; though the one is invisible, the other is to be seen. There are three ways in which our confession of him is to be made.

Verbally. Thus the martyrs confessed him; for they would not have suffered, had they hid his righteousness within their hearts. When Peter and John were forbidden by the council to speak any more in his name, they answered, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." We are to glorify God in our body as well as in our spirit. He has given us speech, not as many use it, but to honour the giver; and with David we should pray, "Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." We could not be satisfied with the heart of a friend, if his tongue was always engaged against us, or indeed if it was never employed for us. Yea, we should say, The thing is impossible; if we had his heart we should have his tongue: "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here, however, be it observed, that we are not to rush into every company like an armed soldier, or to draw the sword of the Spirit upon every one we meet. We are not bound to exasperate or to rebuke when it will call forth mere profaneness or obscenity. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." "A word," says Solomon, "fitly spoken, how good is it! it is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge: and wisdom is profitable to direct. Yet we may err on the side of deficiency as well as excess: and while we shun imprudence, we may be restrained by a cowardly fear or shame, from seizing opportunities that present themselves of speaking usefully, without the violation of any duty or decorum in life. How many of these have we suffered to pass unimproved! "Lord," would Usher often say, "Lord, forgive my sins of omission."

Practically. Confession may be attached to conduct as well as to language: yea, actions, it is proverbially said, speak louder than words. A minister has two individuals belonging to his congregation. The one says little of him, and less to him; but he is con-

stant in his attendance, and bends every thing to enable him to enjoy what he deems a privilege, as well as a duty. The other always extols him much, both before his face and behind his back; but he is seldom in his place, and suffers the most trifling excuses to keep him from what he *so* admires! Does not the practice of the former decide more than the commendations of the latter? We read of those who profess that they know God, but in works deny him; and of the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Many, like Ezekiel's hearers, with their mouth show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness: many, like Judas, even while they kiss, betray. We are required to hold forth the Word of life, not only by our tongues, but tempers; not only by our lips, but lives. When we exemplify the holiness and excellency of the Gospel by our deportment in every condition, and especially when we fully discharge every relative duty; then it is that we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and commend his religion to others.

Passively. "They also serve that wait;" and they also confess that endure. When his followers are willing to sustain the loss of all things rather than forsake him, and instead of complaining rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for his name, they evince the strength and force of their attachment to him, and he is glorified in them. Persons may be exercised with many afflictions who are not called to endure persecution. It is peculiarly as sufferers that many are the Lord's witnesses: and how do they glorify him in the fires, when in patience they possess their souls, and can even rejoice in tribulation also! What a testimony do they bear to the power of his grace and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, when they show that he sustains them when every earthly support gives way; and refreshes and delights them when all creature-consolation is dried up or embittered! The passive graces are with more difficulty exercised than the active. The active fall in with several principles of our nature, especially our love of activity and notice: but to sit alone and keep silence; to suffer on week after week, and month after month, unobserved, unless by partial friendship; mourning indeed but not murmuring; every word, every feeling softly confessing, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me: let thy loving-kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant:"—when I have turned away from such a scene as this, I have said within myself, I have often heard of religion, but I have now seen it: and I have been ready to invite others to return with me, exclaiming,

"Behold the awful portrait, and admire,
Nor stop at wonder; imitate, and live."

NOVEMBER 18.

"*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*"—Matt. x. 32.

Let us see what this promise insures in a way of privilege. It is confession: "him will I *confess* before my Father which is in heaven." The word signifies more than mere attestation: it means acknowledgment with approbation and applause. This would seem incredible, did we not know that the reward is not founded in our worthiness, but is designed to display the exceeding riches of his grace. The Lord thinks better of their works than they ever do; they often blush and weep over their performances, but he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Nothing is more pleasing than praise; and nothing is more stimulating. The desire of it is generally connected with some of the finest sensibilities of our nature. He who is dead to it betrays a mind destined to no distinction, and on which no great or good impression is likely to be made. But observe three things which enhance the privilege here spoken of.

The First is the applauder: "*I* will confess him." In all praise much depends upon the person from whom it is derived. A real proficient therefore in any art studies to approve himself to such as are masters of it. To their judgment he appeals, and their approbation supports and gratifies him under the neglect or the censure of the rude and incompetent. The praise of some is worse than reproach. Our Lord forbad the devils to confess him. Paul was displeased with the spirit of divination in the damsel that cried, "These are the servants of the most high God, which show unto men the way of salvation." Wise men lay little stress upon the caresses of the multitude, who are easily wrought upon, and are led by humour rather than conviction, and can seldom comprehend what they pronounce upon. And therefore a heathen philosopher, when shouted home to his door by the populace, turned round, and said, "What folly or harm have I done to deserve and obtain *your* commendations?" Some hearers are afraid to say a word of praise to a minister, lest they should make him proud and vain. But the danger is imaginary; he has no opinion of their judgment. Praise is debased, and becomes more than worthless by insincerity; it is then flattery, and "he that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." All the friendship of the world is only "lies in hypocrisy." Human applause can add little to our welfare and happiness. The influence of it is confined to time: what can it do for us when sickness spreads a gloom over our comforts, and mortality draws the curtain upon all that is valued on earth? Paul there-

fore says, "It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord." He knows all things; he reads the heart; he is truth itself; *he* is approved whom the *Lord* commendeth. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in *thy* sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer!"

The Second is, In whose presence he will acknowledge us: "I will confess him before *my Father which is in heaven*." Could you choose before whom you would be owned and praised, it would doubtless be one you most highly esteemed, in whose regard you placed your happiness, and who was most able to advance and secure all your interests. And whose blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it? In whose favour is life? Who can do for you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think? Suppose a general, after the termination of a war, returning home, and entering the presence of the king, the fountain of honour; and introducing one by one those who had distinguished themselves under him: he calls them by name, he relates their exploits, he testifies their obedience, their skill, their prowess, their perseverance; and asks for their remuneration and preferment—What could be more gratifying and glorious? Yet what would this be, compared with the conduct of the Lord Jesus, the leader and commander of his people, when, his warfare being accomplished, he shall present those who have fought the good fight of faith before the throne of the Majesty of heaven and earth, and claim for them the promises of the new and everlasting covenant: "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am to behold my glory!"

The Third is the period of commendation. We all know how much depends upon the seasonableness of an action. There is a critical hour when a word spoken in our favour may gain for us a friendship we otherwise should not have known, or an office we should not otherwise have filled; yea, it may decide the whole of our future life. The Lord Jesus does not leave his people without witness now. In various ways he confesses them, even here. But in these words he refers to his confessing them before his Father "at the last day," when he has summoned together the whole universe, and is distributing endless disgrace or honour, happiness or misery. They will have confidence, and not be ashamed before him *at his coming*.

Let this reconcile them to their present comparative obscurity. The world knoweth them not. It is not proper, it would not be safe for them to have all their distinctions here. Their day is coming. It is called the manifestation of the sons of God. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

NOVEMBER 19.

"*I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.*"—1 Pet. v. 1.

This is one of the three characters by which Peter here describes himself to enforce his "exhortation." In the two former, wherein he calls himself "an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ," there is something personal to him: but in the third designation there is nothing peculiar—any further than all real religion is a peculiar thing in our world, where the multitude are evil, and thousands among those who wear the form of godliness are strangers to the power of it. But all who are born of the Spirit stand upon the same ground with Peter with regard to eternity. They are heirs together with him of the grace of life, and each of them is *authorized* to say, "I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Hence three things are observable.

First, The destination of Christians is "glory." The radical idea of glory is brightness, splendour. The secondary notion is excellency displayed—and *this* is what the Scripture intends when it so frequently expresses heaven by the term glory. We think more of the happiness of the state than of the glory. But it will display all kinds of excellency—natural—corporeal—intellectual—moral—social excellency—and the excellency of pleasure, called "the joy of their Lord," "joy unspeakable and full of *glory*."

Secondly, This glory is for future development—It "shall be revealed." It has in a degree been revealed from the beginning. The Jews partially knew it; and as to a clearer discovery of the nature of it, and the way of obtaining it, life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But as yet it has not been revealed externally to all; or internally to many; or completely to any: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Believers indeed have the advantage of something in addition to testimony; and they know more of heaven from what they experience than from what they read or hear. They have certain views and feelings which raise their sentiments more than any thing else—"O if these were rendered permanent and perfect!" But who can imagine what the perfection of them includes? Flesh and blood can no more comprehend than they can inherit the kingdom of God. The full disclosure would be too much for our physical powers to bear, and would subdue all the interest we feel in a thousand things which claim a share in our present attention. The degree of information is wisely adapted to our present state, and while it prepares us for our end does not disqualify us for the way. But we shall not always walk by faith. The object

will not always be veiled. "It doth not *yet* appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall *see* him as he *is*"—It "*shall* be revealed."

And, thirdly, it admits of present participation—"I am," says the Christian, "a partaker of this glory." This seems strange, and we are ready to exclaim, Is then his warfare accomplished? Has he finished his course with joy? Has he passed the valley of the shadow of death! Does he not daily groan, being burdened with afflictions and infirmities? Yet, according to the Scripture, by grace he *is* saved; he *is* come to the new Jerusalem; he *hath* everlasting life; he *is* a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. He is so by union with Christ, his head and representative, who procured it, and has prepared it for him, and has taken possession of it in his name, and holds it on his behalf—"He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And he is so by the certitude and appropriation of faith: for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The believer can realize as sure and as present whatever God has engaged to give. He is so by actual possession in the foretastes, the earnests, the beginnings. Under whatever representations heaven be held forth the Christian has it in quality, and in degree. He is a partaker of it as the bud partakes of the flower, and the dawn of the day, and the child of the man. The believer's anticipations are not confined to any particular season or condition, but he is often *peculiarly* a partaker of this glory in four cases—In the seclusion and liberty of the closet—In the ordinances of the sanctuary—In the supports and comforts of affliction—And in the elevated experience of a dying hour.

Is this your attainment? Can you say, "I am a partaker of the glory which shall be revealed?" How ought you to feel and to demean yourself? Walk worthy of God who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. Let your conversation become your condition. Let it be dignified, cheerful, and especially grateful. You were children of wrath, but are now heirs of glory, yea and even partakers of it—What should you render for blessings so great, and obtained by means so infinitely expensive?

And if you are not partakers, should you not lay it to heart? Should you not seek after an interest in it? Whatever else you possess you must soon leave; and no abundance of it can afford you satisfaction even in the enjoyment. But here the object will relieve every want, it will fill up every desire. And success is sure to crown your application if you seek according to the true order. Only remember the time of finding is both short and uncertain. You cannot be happy too soon; and your safety leaves you not a moment to lose—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

NOVEMBER 20.

"*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*"—Matt. xxv. 41.

What a contrast between this sentence and the language addressed by the same Judge to those on his right hand! That says, "ye blessed of my Father;" this, "ye cursed." That says, "Come;" this, "Depart." That says, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" this says, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The words are not for declamation, but belief. This "terror of the Lord" was not intended to be defined and comprehended, but was to be left to those forebodings of imagination in which there can be no danger of excess—"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear so is thy wrath." We shall not therefore dwell upon the duration, or the nature, of this misery; but only remark three things.

The first regards the origin of this dreadful state. It was not it seems at first provided for the human race, but "prepared for the devil and his angels." Yet being prepared, the abode could receive any other rebels as well as they; and those who will join his party in our world, and do the works of the devil, as they have shared in the same sin, must share in the same suffering with him and his followers. Thus the sinner renders *their* place his *own;* as it is said of Judas, "he went to his own place."

The second regards the certainty of the doom. The denouncement is not an idle tale; it is not the offspring of the nursery, or the creation of priestcraft. The consciences of men tell them this, and much more frequently and seriously than they are willing to acknowledge. The misery is such, that if there was only a probability, or even a possibility of incurring it, wisdom would justify a submission to all the self-denial and sacrifices the Gospel demands. The children of this world act upon this principle, where their temporal interests are concerned. They throw overboard the lading of the vessel when they are not sure, but only apprehensive of a shipwreck: and yield to the painful excision of a limb when the preservation of the whole body is not certain, but probable, and in some cases possible. But before a man can suppose that this misery is not possible, and even probable;

before he can question the certainty of it, he must prove either that our Lord never uttered these words as the Gospel affirms, or that if he did utter them he is not to be depended upon. But he is the faithful witness; and the Scripture cannot be broken. What a task then has the infidel to perform before he can lay his apprehensions to rest, and bid defiance to this sentence—He must prove that the Bible is a lie, or Jesus a liar. Men may be ignorant of these things, but they must be "willingly ignorant." And they cannot be ignorant long. And, considering the uncertainty of life, how soon, very soon may they be convinced too late! Hobbes said, when dying, "I yield my body to the earth, and my soul to the great perhaps." Thistlewood the traitor said to one of his comrades as he was ascending the drop, "We shall soon know the great secret"—He meant, whether there was another world; and after death the judgment. What wretched infatuation to leave the decision till the discovery and the remediless ness arrive together! It is hardly necessary to observe that the denial of the thing will not disprove it. Suppose a criminal by some delusion persuades himself that the assize will not be kept—He goes on—but while he is engaged or amused, hark! the trumpets sound, the judge is entering, and to-morrow he must appear. Men may reason, disbelieve, ridicule; but the scene neither slumbers nor lingers—"The end is come; the end is come."

The third respects the character of those who fall under the malediction. And surely they must be persons charged with crimes too shocking for human nature often to commit: surely they can only be Cains, and Pharaohs, and Belshazzars, and Herods, and Robespierres. But no. They are not represented as tyrants, robbers, adulterers, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers. Many of them were free of what is commonly called vice. They had negative virtues, and often boasted that they did no harm. But they led easy and indolent lives. They exercised no self-denial. They made no sacrifices not only for God whom they had not seen, but for their brother whom they had seen. They have judgment without mercy, because they showed no mercy. They had unfeeling hearts, and tearless eyes; their hands never relieved the necessitous; their feet never visited the door of affliction—It is the decision of One too wise to be mistaken, and too faithful to misrepresent—"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

NOVEMBER 21.

"*I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*"—Ruth i. 21.

These are the words of Naomi, who, from the famine which raged in her own country, had fled to Moab for succour, and had now returned back to her native place. In a village every occurrence, especially the coming back of an inhabitant after years of absence, excites notice, and the news soon spreads through the neighbourhood. So it was here. The arrival of Naomi, accompanied with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, awakens curiosity, and huddles together the rustics in little groups, pointing with the finger, and making remarks and inquiries—"So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi?" At which she burst into tears, and said, "Call me not Naomi"—that is, pleasant; "Call me Mara"—that is, bitter: "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Whence we may observe,

That when persons go from home, they little think what may befall them before their return. This will apply even to life itself. Some, like Elimelech, never come back. An accident demolishes their frame; or a disease arrests them too violently to admit of their removal: their relations arrive just in time to see them die, or they die in the midst of strangers. They little imagined that when they left their own door they were never to enter it again; and that the leave they had taken of their family was a farewell for ever! "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

It applies also as to character. Some have been converted while from home: they have met with a godly acquaintance whose conversation, or have attended an evangelical minister whose preaching has been useful to their souls; and they have returned with new views and feelings, and have become all an-

xious to bring their connexions into the same state with themselves. Others, alas! have gone out moral and returned vicious, profaning the Sabbath they had once revered as the holy of the Lord and honourable; and ridiculing a book which they once regarded as given by inspiration of God. How many, in travelling, run uncalled for into dangers! And how necessary is it, even in lawful, because necessary journeys, to commit our way unto the Lord, and pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!"

It also applies to our outward circumstances. Some go out empty, and come home again full. This was the case with Jacob. He left Beer-sheba with nothing but the charge and blessing of Isaac: and in his pleading with God in his journey, he only asks for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a return to his father's house in peace. But hear him on his return: "with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." And thus it has been with many since. They set off with no raised expectation, and with no design formed, excepting to gain an humble subsistence: but difficulties vanished before them; the Lord prospered their way; blessed the labour of their hands; and gave them power to get wealth. Others have gone out with confidence flattered by the most pleasing prospects. But every enterprise failed; every dependence gave way; every comfort fled; till they were left like a beacon upon the top of the mountain, or a vessel stranded and wrecked upon the shore—Therefore we observe again,

That it is no unusual thing for the same individual to experience both fullness and privation. "Ah," says Naomi, "once I had a husband, now I am a widow. Once I had children, now I am childless. Once I had importance, now I am without influence. Once I had substance, now I am destitute—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Not only is there a diversity of conditions among men, so that while one is in splendour another is in obscurity, and while one is rich another is poor—but the very same person may successively be distinguished and neglected, be wealthy and indigent. These transitions are sometimes gradual; and sometimes sudden and wholly unlooked for. But Scripture, and all history and observation, more than remind us of the possibility of these changes: and wisdom admonishes us to improve them—First, by not depending upon our possessions and enjoyments. Shall we set our heart on that which is not? Secondly, by using them liberally while we have them. Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away: but, says an old writer, we may clip their wings by charity. And Solomon says, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." So that not only is the principal safe, but the interest Divine. "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." And Thirdly, by being prepared for every vicissitude. "I know," says Paul, "how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." It is one thing to know what it *is* to possess, and what it is to lose, and another to know *how*—that is, how to behave in each as becometh the principles of a Christian. It is a great thing to prosper and not be exalted above measure; and to be reduced without being swallowed up of over-much sorrow. To be full and not deny him, and say, Who is the Lord? And to be poor, and not steal or take the name of our God in vain. Yet this is possible; and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the soul may be braced up to such a moral strength of constitution, as to brave any climate or change of weather, however great or sudden.

See also how piety will acknowledge the hand of God in every event. An ordinary mind would have said, "I went out full, and am come back empty." But Naomi did not live without God with her in the world—Noami says, "I went out full, and *the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*" So Eli said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." And Job, instead of dwelling on the Sabeans and the elements, said, "the *Lord hath taken* away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

God is not the author of sin; but as to suffering—"Is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" Does not he make darkness as well as create light? There is nothing like chance, especially in our trials; neither are we to think only or principally of second causes. It is a view of God's agency alone that can preserve us, either from sinning or sinking in the day of adversity. But the cup which my Father giveth me shall I not drink it? I can trust in him—He spared not his own Son—He has always my welfare at heart—

> "Good when he gives, supremely good;
> Nor less when he denies:
> E'en crosses from his sovereign hand
> Are blessings in disguise."

O let me hold communion with him, not only in his word, but in his works: not only in his ordinances, but in his dispensations. Let me cleave to him as my exceeding joy, and my everlasting portion, in all the revolutions of time. And look forward not only to a pure, but permanent state of blessedness—

> "All, all on earth is shadow—all beyond
> Is substance. The reverse is folly's creed.
> How solid all where change shall be no more!"

NOVEMBER 22.

"Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."—Matt. xxii. 4.

God has provided for all his creatures according to their kinds: "the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season." Man is a compound being; for his body there is the storehouse and wardrobe of nature. But in all this there is nothing for his nobler part, the mind. Here the Gospel comes in to meet his exigences—and with nothing less than a feast—and while every other feast is for the body—this is entirely for the soul.

The spirituality of this feast constitutes the excellency of it, and at the same time accounts for the neglect of it. If provision was made to gratify the animal appetites, or the desire for worldly riches and honour, it would easily excite attention. But men are earthly, and sensual; they are governed by things that are seen and temporal. Hence they hear of spiritual and everlasting things with indifference. But is not this folly and madness? Is not the mind the man? Does not he who knew the value of the soul from the price he paid for the redemption of it, does not he ask, "What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The feast here is not an ordinary one. It is a royal feast, a royal marriage feast, a royal marriage feast for the king's son. Yet what may we look for in such a feast as this, that is not to be found in the dispensation of the Gospel?

Is it plenitude? Here we have it. We read of "abundant mercy"—of "plenteous redemption"—of a Saviour "full of grace and truth—of "all the fullness of God." Is it variety? Here we have it. Our wants and hopes are not only numerous, but various; and equally so are our supplies. Here is light for our darkness. Righteousness for our guilt. Strength for our weakness. Renovation for the heart. Peace for the conscience. The supply of the Spirit. The comforts of the Holy Ghost. Is it richness of entertainment? What else can be the meaning of the expressions, "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined?" God prepares dainties for his guests, and they are all supreme in their kind, and infinitely expensive. The Jews did eat angels' food: but what was the manna in the Desert compared with the bread of life? He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Is it fellowship? A feast is not a private meal, an individual indulgence, but an entertainment designed to promote friendship, and social intercourse, and gratification. And here we have it. We are not solitary partakers, but have companions the most agreeable, and excellent, and numerous. We sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with prophets and apostles, with the noble army of martyrs; with the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Is it enjoyment? A man at a feast discharges himself from anxieties, and gives up himself to pleasure and delight—"a feast is made for laughter." "Joy becomes a feast," and is promoted by it. But no pleasure, no delight can resemble that which results from an experience of Divine grace. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." What a contrast between them and others! "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."

Yet it is lamentable to think that, though all things are ready, and all are invited to the feast, many make light of it, and go their way. We are therefore commanded to "compel" you to come in, that the house may be filled. Not that violence is to be employed. The compulsion is to be suited to a rational nature; and therefore to consist only of the urgency of persuasion by argument and motive. And here the difficulty lies not in convincing the judgment—since no one, unless an infidel, will deny the propriety of complying with this call at some time—but *not at present*. Go thy way, therefore; at *this* time you really, if not verbally, say to the importunity, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee. But is not this delay and postponement infinitely dangerous? Your season, your only season, is rapidly passing away. How soon will the bridge be drawn, and the door be shut! And then the things which belong to your peace will be hid from your eyes. Admitting that according to your *present* feelings you are resolved to seek at some future period, that period may never come. Sickness is not always the forerunner of death. The disease too may render you incapable of thought, and then your purposed repentance will be impracticable. Impracticable it will always be, unless the Spirit of God works in you; but if you resist his strivings now, what right have you to expect that he will return then, and by the most wonderful operation conquer your inveterate indisposition?

Yea, the procrastination is as unreasonable as it is dangerous. Your compliance is as necessary to your living comfortably as to your

dying safely. Though the happiness of those who receive Christ Jesus the Lord is completed above, it is begun below. They have many present attainments. They do enter into rest. Their souls are satisfied as with marrow and fatness. The Lord is their shepherd. To him they have committed all their concerns. All that is really good for them is secured by his power, love, and promise. Their tormenting fears are removed. Their vain and restless desires are subdued. They have indeed their afflictions, but these are sanctified and softened; and in a little time all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. Can you imagine that God will suffer his enemies to be more happy than his friends? Can a persuasion that God is your Father, and death your deliverer, and heaven your home, tend to make you less happy? What has the world done for you? Have you not found the way of transgressors hard? Forsake the foolish and live. All is "prepared" for you—God is ready to receive you, angels are ready to rejoice over you, believers are ready to hail you —"All things are ready—Come unto the marriage."

NOVEMBER 23.

"He that doeth truth *cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*"—John iii. 21.

Of the individual here spoken of, the CHARACTER, the BUSINESS, and the AIM are all very instructive and improving.

What is his CHARACTER? "*He doeth truth.*" It is not said he readeth truth, heareth truth, speaketh truth, but doeth truth. Doing truth is rather a peculiar expression; and the question is how truth is to be here understood. Now there is the truth of doctrine, and the truth of sincerity.

He doeth truth according to the former of these who pays it a practical attention. In this case the truth is the word of God, which is filled, not with curious speculations, but matters of unspeakable importance; and designed not to inform our judgments only, but to sanctify and govern our hearts and lives. Hence it is called, "the way of truth," because it is something in which we are to walk: we frequently read of "walking in the truth." "If ye know these things," says our Saviour, "happy are ye if ye *do* them:" and he compares the man who heareth his sayings and *doeth* them not to a fool who builds his house upon the sand and is ruined by the storm. The Apostle speaks of "the work of faith;" and tells us the word of God "worketh effectually in them that believe." The whole of it is a doctrine "according to godliness." No part of it can be uninfluential when properly regarded. Its threatenings are designed and adapted to awaken our fear. Its promises are to excite our hope. It is needless to mention its commands—these can be given for no other purpose than to be obeyed. And are we not commanded to forsake the world, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow the Saviour, to go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach, and when we have done all to say we are unprofitable servants, and to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? And he that doeth this doeth truth.

He doeth truth according to the latter of these who acts consistently with his convictions of it. There are many who resist their belief; or, as the Apostle says, "hold the truth in unrighteousness:" the word is, imprison it. They will not suffer it to enter their tempers, and sway their conduct. They believe that the world is vanity and vexation of spirit, and the belief is true, yet it does not induce them to forsake it. They believe that the worship of God in their families is a duty, and the belief is true, yet they neglect it. The same may be said of a thousand other things. But the man that doeth truth gives up himself to his convictions, and follows them whithersoever they lead him, regardless of consequences. He may have little knowledge for the time, but he conforms to it; for sincerity cannot consist with the omission of any known duty, or the indulgence of any known sin. Nathanael was the very man in our text; and therefore our Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." He had laboured under considerable mistakes; but he loved retirement, and had been alone praying to be made wise unto salvation. He had little light, but he sought for more; he was open to advice and reproof; he complied with Philip's invitation, "Come and see" for thyself; and upon our Saviour's intimation, "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee," he exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel" —And upon this Jesus promised to show him "greater things than these."

There are some who are not equally prudent and kind. They are not tender of persons who cannot for the time go all their lengths. Yet were not they led into their present views step by step? Have they not been for years learning what they do not yet sufficiently understand? And do they wonder that others are not completely initiated in a few days or weeks? What a difference is there between the dawn and the day! and yet is not the one the beginning and the pledge of the other? And "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And "then," says the prophet, "shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." If I see a man con-

vinced of sin, humbled under a sense of his unworthiness, delivered from the spirit of the world, and seriously engaged in the use of the means of grace, let me not be harsh because he feels some doubts and difficulties from which others are *now* delivered: let me affectionately admonish him, as far as he has already attained, to walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing, assured that if in any thing else he be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto him in his own time, and way, and degree. Let me not engage him in angry disputes, or force upon him the deep things of God which he is unprepared to receive; but leave him for time, and observation, and experience to enlarge his views, and be willing to teach him as he is able to hear it. Paul gave strong meat to them that were of full age, and who by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil: but he fed babes with milk—Some give babes strong meat, yea, and even the bones of controversy!

It is well for persons to try their ground, and to feel their own way; and he walketh surely that walketh uprightly; and he that doth his will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. Some of the most eminent characters that have adorned the Church attained their evangelical sentiments by degrees, and principally derived them from experience. The changes in nature are gradual; the seasons melt into each other; there are no disruptions. There also things are slower in their growth in proportion to their value. The oak, the king of the forest, does not shoot up all at once like nettles and reeds. The mushroom is the vegetation of a night—We are not fond of mushroom-converts. We have never been taught by the result to admire those who instantly become so wise, talkative, disputatious, and decisive. Their knowledge gets dangerously in advance, while its companions and guardians, experience and practice, are left so far behind. The knowledge they boast of is like the head of a rickety child, too large for the other parts of the body; it is the effect not of strength, but of weakness and disease; and by destroying proportion is not a beauty, but a deformity.

Whatever be the defects of him that doeth truth, he may be known by this—If he has not the light, "*he cometh to the light.*"

NOVEMBER 24.

"*He that doeth truth* COMETH TO THE LIGHT, *that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.*"—John iii. 21.

WHAT is his BUSINESS?

"*He cometh to the light.*" He is not averse to it. He is not afraid of it. Why should *he* wish to shun it? It is for the thief, the murderer, the adulterer, to feel the morning as the shadow of death; not the man who is honestly going forth to his work and to labour until the evening. "If," says the man that is upright in the way—"if I am not right, I wish, above all things, to *be* right, and to be led into *all* truth. Hide nothing from me. Where my soul and eternity are concerned I dread delusion. I cannot bear uncertainty. Let me come to the light." And how does he this! He does it five ways.

He comes to the light by self-inspection. There are cases in which he will more solemnly and expressly examine himself: such as the close of the year; and when he is approaching the table of the Lord; and when under those events which are called by the sacred writers trials, because they are intended to show us what manner of spirit we are of. But he will be habitually a self-observer, and will look not only at his actions, but especially at his motives and the state of his heart.

He comes to the light by attention to the Scriptures. To their decisions, and counsels, and reproofs, he endeavours to lay himself fairly open. And instead of turning away from those parts which more particularly bear upon his own office and condition, towards *them* he will look more frequently and fully. "Am I a parent? Am I a member of a church? Am I poor? Am I prosperous? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

He comes to the light by hearing the word preached. The minister is to take forth the precious from the vile; to discriminate characters, to divide the word of truth, and to give to every hearer his appropriate encouragement or censure. And he that doeth truth will receive his word with meekness. He will not try to bribe the prophet, or desire him to prophesy smooth things. He will not be offended because the preacher is faithful; but will say to him, as Eli did to Samuel, who had received a message from God concerning him, "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee." Such a man is likely to apply too much to himself rather than too little. And this will commonly be the case with regard to those things which are said to unmask hypocrites, and to exclude the usurpers of religious privileges. It is not easy, says Bishop Hall, to beat out the dogs without making the children cry.

He cometh to the light by religious intercourse. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." And whom can they better consult, than those who know the way, not from maps and books only, but from having, and some of them a long time, travelled in it themselves. They feel an interest in such inquiries, and will be sure to sympathize with them; and will be able to

solve many a doubt, and remove many a fear. They can speak from their own experience. And blessed be God there are few neighbourhoods now in which such helpers as these are not to be found—and the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred-fold!

Above all, he doth this by prayer; humble, and earnest, and persevering prayer, for divine teaching. This is *indeed* coming to the light; it is coming to the fountain of light, coming to "the Father of lights," from whom every good and every perfect gift descends. He will convince us that the way of man is not in himself, and that no means, however good in themselves, can render needless his own agency. But none teacheth like him. He can make the very deaf to hear, and the blind to see. Under the influence of his direction, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Happy they who are brought to his feet, and are crying from the heart, "Lead me in thy truth, and guide me; for thou art the God of my salvation, on *Thee* do I wait all the day." "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." They will not, they cannot seek him in vain. He has said, and the Scripture cannot be broken, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"

NOVEMBER 25.

"*He that doeth truth cometh to the light*, THAT HIS DEEDS MAY BE MADE MANIFEST, THAT THEY ARE WROUGHT IN GOD."—John iii. 21.

WHAT is his AIM?

"*That his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*"

The aim is personal: "*His* deeds." There are some who live much abroad, and are eager to pry into the affairs and condition of others, and it extends even to their religious concerns. But we are commanded to "commune with our own hearts." When our Lord had foretold the duty and destiny of Peter, Peter should have instantly prayed, "Lord, prepare me for all thy will;" but instead of this he asks concerning John, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" But our Saviour, far from encouraging such curiosity, said, "What if I will that he tarry till I come? What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Many, it is to be feared, in reading and hearing, think more of others than of themselves; but we should endeavour to bring home the subject, whatever it be, to our own souls—"Am I neglecting this duty? Do I stand exposed to this threatening? Am I the heir of this promise? Have I any part or lot in this matter? Is *my* heart right in the sight of God?" This is the case with the man that "doeth truth and cometh to the light."

The aim is practical: that "his *deeds*"—Not his opinions and sentiments only or principally. *They* are indeed of importance, and he will be concerned to have them in accordance with the Scripture: but if a man does not in his inquiry go beyond the determination of the orthodoxy of his creed, he forgets that the devils also believe and tremble. He forgets that faith without works is dead, being alone. "Can faith save him?" Yes; but not *such* faith: and this was the meaning of the Apostle. The faith that saves, as he observes, *shows* itself by its *works*. It works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcometh the world. Real believers stand, walk, live by faith. We therefore must look after the influences and effects of the truth as it is in Jesus: we must remark our *deeds*, our actions, conduct, course of life. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them—By this our state and character are to be evinced: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

The aim is important: "That his deeds may be *made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*" That is, whether they are the mere produce of nature, or the genuine effects of Divine grace. Here it is admitted as a principle that the religion of a Christian is not self-derived, but springs from a Divine source. How can it be otherwise? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? The stream cannot rise higher than the fountain: no effect can exceed its cause in any thing. That which is of the flesh is flesh: but that which is spiritual must be of the Spirit. Accordingly God has promised to put his Spirit within his people: and to this every thing good, either possessed or done by them, is ascribed—They are his workmanship—This people, says he, have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise.

And behold the grand point to decide. It would indeed be absurd to press some of you to determine this thing. It is obvious already that *your* deeds are not wrought in God. *You* can feel no uncertainty in your minds concerning it. *You* must be sure that your disregard of private prayer, your neglect of family worship, your violations of the Sabbath, your intemperance, pride, covetousness, and revenge, cannot come from the Spirit of him that calleth you.

But some persons make pretensions to piety who would do well to inquire—whether there is any thing in their religion that requires or bespeaks a Divine agency. For surely they may have a form of knowledge, or a form of

godliness, they may come to his house and honour him with their lips, they may pray without desire, and sing without praise, without having the Spirit of the living God dwelling in them. Are we not only convinced, but converted! Not only reformed, but renovated! Not only excited in our passions, but transformed by the renewing of the mind! Have we not only another heart, but a new one? Do we differ not only from others, but from our former selves! Do we worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh! Do we bear any of the unerring features of the household of faith? Do we feel like them! Are our joys, and sorrows, and hopes, and fears the same with theirs who are led by the Spirit of God and are the sons of God? Are we running with them in the race that is set before us? and fighting with them the good fight of faith?

How much depends upon the decision! It involves the glory of God. For we cannot praise him for doing what we think he has not done, or conferring what we think he has not conferred. We may bless him for the exercise of his patience, and for favouring us with space for repentance, and the means of grace; but this is not the glowing gratitude of the man who can say, "Thou hast wrought all our works in us." It also must affect our own comfort; according to the words of the Apostle; "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." The joy does not arise from the consciousness of his being the *author* of the work, but the *subject* of it: it is his "own work," not as it is wrought *by* him, but *in* him. And how delightful, how animating must the persuasion of this Divine reality prove! And what may we not expect from the experience of it! "Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

The decision is not more important than it is possible. We are commanded to seek it. We are provided with all the means and assistances essential to the attainment. The very anxiety to determine is a token for good; and is here made by our Lord himself to characterize the subject: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

NOVEMBER 26.

"*I shall be satisfied.*"—Psalm xvii. 15.

The Lord's people are not strangers to satisfaction now. We read of their being satisfied early with his favour; satisfied with his goodness; abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house. But this is true only in degree: that is, they are satisfied, compared with what others feel, and with what they themselves once felt. They have found the supreme good, and they desire nothing beyond it—But they desire more of it—They long to know their Lord and Saviour more clearly, to resemble him more fully, to enjoy him more entirely. David therefore speaks of his satisfaction as future; and not only mentions the source of it; "I will behold thy face in righteousness;" but fixes the period: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness."

Here we see, shall I say—the insatiable ambition religion inspires. What an enlargedness of views and feelings do the subjects of Divine grace experience! so that they not only pass by, as beneath their attention, what mortals idolize, but soar beyond all that God himself has done for them here, content with nothing short of his full vision and likeness in heaven; keeping on the wing, and continuing all manner of search, till they reach a rest and a prize so distant and so infinite! And we have witnessed this grandeur and elevation of soul, even in the humblest walks of pious life. The rude mechanic, and the illiterate ploughman, though incapable of constructing the poetry, have felt all the sentiment of the poet—

> "He by himself hath sworn,
> I on his oath depend;
> I shall, on eagle wings upborne,
> To heaven ascend:
>
> "I shall behold his face,
> I shall his power adore;
> And sing the wonders of his love,
> For evermore."

How mean-spirited are the aims and taste of the worldly hero and philosopher, compared with this!

Here we behold the excellency of the soul. It is the prerogative of man only to be capable of such sublime satisfaction. But he was made for it; and his destination explains the enigma he now presents. Detached from this prospect, his greatness would be inexplicable. He would seem a vessel freighted at an incalculable expense, for an important enterprise, and as if designed to sail an immense voyage, only to cruise a few leagues and a few days, and then founder and be lost. Other creatures have a good suited to their nature, and they partake of it, and look no further, but are satisfied. Is man satisfied? He has faculties which carry him beyond the limits of his condition. He has an imagination which nothing can realize. He feels desires and expectations which nothing fulfils. He is struck with novelty, and pleased with diversions; but these, after a while, lose their charm; and by the time he has reached sixty or seventy, he seems to have run his round, and feels an ennui irksome and intolerable, unless he is animated by the spirit of our text. This would explain, and relieve, and enliven all, by showing him that the present is only the threshold

of existence; that he is now only in a state of instruction and discipline; that nothing is designed to detain him here; that this is only a passage to the home of his heart and his portion for ever.

But what a view does it give us of this blessedness, that it *can*, that it *will* satisfy every longing of the soul itself! Here two things will serve additionally to enhance its greatness. Our capacities will be amazingly enlarged hereafter to what they now are. Men who have put away childish things, require far more to satisfy them than is necessary for infants. We should think highly of any thing that would satisfy such minds as Newton's and Bacon's. But the least in the kingdom of heaven will be greater than they. Then we must think of the duration of the pleasure. Many things will satisfy for a while; but here are thousands of ages to be provided for. What discoveries and employments, what acquisitions and enjoyments must those be, which will yield undeclining satisfaction for ever and ever!

What do you think of this? Is not such a prospect inviting? Does any thing here satiate the hunger and thirst of the mind? Do you not feel vanity in every success, as well as vexation of spirit in every disappointment? Yet this is your best condition—It is all the happiness you will know if you die out of Christ. You will then awake; but it will be to know the reality of the blessedness of which we speak—to know that you have lost it—lost it for ever—and lost it for nothing. You will therefore awake to everlasting shame and contempt.

But as for you, ye heirs of glory, turn the prospect of this satisfaction to your advantage. For which purpose—First, make it sure. Secondly, keep it clear. Thirdly, bring it near. Fourthly, use it daily. Carry it into your religious duties; it will enliven you. Carry it into your trials; it will sustain you. Carry it into the valley of the shadow of death; it will comfort you. A notion formerly prevailed, that if a man travelled with a myrtle wand in his hand, he would feel no fainting or weariness. Here is the reality of the fiction—This hope is the true myrtle staff. Take it constantly along with you: and you will renew your strength—you will run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

NOVEMBER 27.

"*He knoweth the way that I take.*"—Job xxiii. 10.

This, under the dark and distressing dispensation with which he was exercised, afforded Job relief and satisfaction—The knowledge of his covenant God and Father: "*He* knoweth the way that I take." But what are we to understand by this knowledge? Acquaintance and approbation.

First, acquaintance. So he knoweth the way that his people take: and so he knoweth also the way that others take. But *they* do not deem this a privilege; yea, it is an irksome and fearful reflection; and therefore instead of having recourse to it for consolation, *they* endeavour to banish it from their minds "For he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light." He feels pleasure in the thought, "Thou God seest me." Not that he is so vain and ignorant as to imagine that he can bear censureless the gaze of Omniscience; far from it: he is conscious that God will see much that is amiss in him—but he is conscious too, that God himself will see nothing wrong in him which he does not wish to have rectified. "I must be cured; and *he* alone can heal me; and therefore I rejoice that his knowledge prepares him to deal unerringly with me; and therefore I can pray, See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

And as this relieves him with regard to his experience, so it comforts him with regard to his outward condition and circumstances in the world. He telleth all my wanderings. He knoweth all my walking through this great wilderness. He sees all my dangers, and can defend and guide me. I know not the way that I take, but *he* knoweth it, and my welfare depends upon *his* knowledge, not mine. He is now bringing the blind by a way that they know not, and is leading them in paths that they have not known; and he *will* make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight; these things will he do unto them and not forsake them. All is now perfectly clear to him; and I can trust him when he says, And *thou* shalt know hereafter.

There is also another case. "Am I misunderstood by friends, and reproached by enemies, while acting conscientiously and uprightly? How pleasing is it to turn from creatures so liable to err, and appeal to him who searcheth the heart, and discerns our motives and aims! My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high." "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal"—"He knoweth the way that I take."

Secondly, approbation. Thus "he knoweth the way of the righteous," but does not know the way of the ungodly. "For the way of the ungodly shall perish;" he "is angry with the wicked every day." But if any man love God, the same is known of him. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. The words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts are acceptable in his sight. And that Job here peculiarly intends approbation is obvious from the words which follow: "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way

have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." So confesses the Church: "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death." And says David, "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes." And it is well when in our sufferings we can approve ourselves unto God. You are not, says Peter, to suffer as evil-doers, but as Christians; and therefore he adds, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Jacob had this satisfaction when he was returning from Padan-aram, and had to meet his infuriated brother: he could therefore plead, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Thy word has brought me into this strait; and therefore I have a gracious right to rely upon thy care for safety and deliverance. It was otherwise with Elijah when he fled from the face of Jezebel, and concealed himself in the cave at Horeb: and therefore says God, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" He was unable to frame an answer that did not reflect upon his own fear and distrust; and had not God dealt with him better than he deserved, he would have found that the turning away of the simple slays them.

But whatever be our state and circumstances, let us seek the testimony that we please God, and labour that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him. What can sustain and animate like this? "Let them curse, but bless thou."

NOVEMBER 28.

"*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*"—Ephes. i. 3.

THERE is a correspondence observable between God and his people; or, so to speak, a spiritual flux and reflux from God to them, and from them to God. He chooses them, and they choose him. He sanctifies them, and they sanctify him. He glorifies them, and they glorify him.

Thus, in the words before us, we have grace for grace, and blessing for blessing. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." All our happiness and duty are found in this circulation. If God does not bless us, we are miserable; if we do not bless God, we are criminal.

Yet there is a great difference between these benedictions. His blessing us precedes our blessing him, and we love him because he first loved us. His blessing us is a real communication; and the Apostle characterizes the benefits which it bestows four ways: by their quality; by their plenitude; by their residence; and by their relation—He blesses us with "spiritual" blessings; with "all" spiritual blessings; with all spiritual blessings "in heavenly places;" with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places "in Christ." But our blessing of God can add nothing to his perfection. Our goodness extendeth not to him. He is exalted above all blessing and praise. Yet we can praise him declaratively; and he that offereth praise glorifieth him.

The soul of this is gratitude. Gratitude has been defined as a disposition to return a favour received. Towards man it may be thus expressed; it may be thus fully expressed; yea, more than an equivalency or compensation for a benefit has been often made: but in this manner it can never be expressed towards God. His goodness is infinite; and therefore our gratitude is to appear not in discharging our obligations, but in feeling them, and in a concern to make suitable returns while adequate ones are out of our power. Thus David asks, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" And thus we bless him, not only verbally, but practically, and show forth his praise, as it is beautifully expressed, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Who does this? Who is not condemned by this subject? Instead of blessing God, we are senseless or silent. Instead of abundantly uttering the memory of his great goodness, we are murmurers and complainers. Suffer the clamour of a few trials to drown the voice of a thousand mercies—Yet Paul had suffered the loss of all things, and was even a prisoner when *he* used this glowing language, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

We are backward to all religious exercises, but even selfishness may make us attentive to other duties. Compelled by our necessities, we pray; we call upon our Benefactor in the day of trouble; but when we have gained our purpose, we soon forget his works, and the wonders which he has shown us. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Even Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done him, for his heart was

lifted up. Who can reflect upon this, and not exclaim, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

Let me then lay down three rules, by observing which we shall experience and express more of this blessed and blessing temper of mind.

First. Labour to ascertain your own interest in Divine things. Seek the full assurance of hope unto the end. O! when I can view the blessings revealed in the Gospel as *my* portion, when "I can read *my* title clear to mansions in the skies," when I can draw near to God as *my* exceeding joy, then all the powers of gratitude are touched; then all its springs are opened; then by the mercies of God I present my body as a living sacrifice; then I say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Secondly. Often and carefully consider your mercies. Nothing can affect us but as it is in our thoughts. Therefore forget not all his benefits. Make them pass and repass in your reviews. Dwell upon the evils from which you have been delivered, the provision with which you have been fed, the robes with which you have been adorned—Once a slave, now redeemed; once guilty, now justified from all things; once a child of wrath, now an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Ebenezer! Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Thirdly. Gain and preserve a growing sense of your unworthiness. There is an inseparable connexion between humility and gratitude. A proud man was never known to be grateful. Heap therefore whatever favours you please upon him, and what thanks have ye? And the reason is, because he thinks he deserves your kindness, and that you are doing justly rather than showing mercy. But he who is sensible that he is not worthy of the least indulgence, will feel obliged by every attention. And what is the fact with regard to us? We are not only mean, but criminal. For proof of this we need not go back to the days of unregeneracy. What have we been since we have known God, or rather have been known of him? Let us look at our omissions of duty, our misimprovement of privileges, our debasements of motive; the sins of our holy things. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed! Yet we are in the possession of grace! And in the prospect of glory!

NOVEMBER 29.

"*A partner.*"—Philemon 17.

The whole verse reads thus: "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself." In this argument, on the behalf of Onesimus, Paul does not employ his authority or plead his apostleship. He does not describe himself from his extraordinary commission and endowments, but calls himself "a partner" with Philemon in the mutual interests of Christianity. John also speaks much in the same way when he refers to himself: "I, John, am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."

As Paul here speaks of himself as a Christian, under the character of "a partner," we are led to observe that all Christians are thus related to each other.

There are partners in business. This does not wholly apply to the case before us. The salvation of our own souls is an individual and a personal concern; and is carried on between God and ourselves. Others may do some things for us; but as they cannot eat, and drink, and sleep for us, so they cannot repent, and believe, and obey for us. Here the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. He that is wise is profitable to himself; and shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Yet there is a common concern in which all Christians are jointly and equally engaged. It is to serve and glorify God by maintaining his cause in the world, and by endeavouring to enlarge his empire and multiply the number of his followers. This does not require them to live together in the same place, or to labour in the same way: but they are bound to co-operate in the use of all the means in their power to advance the same end—abiding with God in their callings—having gifts differing according to the proportion of faith—and faithful as stewards of the manifold grace of God—each aiming to be accepted of him.

But there are partners in privileges, and this applies entirely to Christians. They are all "partakers of the benefit." "Partakers of Christ." They "are all one in Christ Jesus." Jude speaks of "the common salvation:" and we read of our being called by God "into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." We read also of "the fellowship of his sufferings," by which we understand an equal right to all the blessings derived from his cross,—reconciliation, redemption, justification, and sanctification. In the ministrations of the Word, the ordinances of religion, the influences and comforts of the Holy Ghost, we have fellowship one with another, and are heirs together of the grace of life.

This partnership may be judged of by the privileges they share in. These privileges are distinguished by four characters. They are spiritual in their nature. They are inestimable in their value. They are free—without money and without price in their bestowment. And they are in their possession

secure from loss and injury—"the sure mercies of David."

Am I a partner? There is not a better evidence in your favour than your anxious concern to determine this; and your being able to say with Paul—the partner here spoken of, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; that I may win Christ and be found in him." David also could say, "Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear thy name:" and how was it with him? What was *his* prayer? "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation: that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."

And if you are a partner, how should this encourage and comfort you, that in all your obscurity and affliction you have "the communion of saints"—an interest—an equal interest with all the blessed of the Lord, whether on earth or in heaven, in all the enjoyments, riches, and glories which constitute their portion for ever!

And should you not be concerned to bring in others to share with you? Surely there is enough, and to spare. Your claim will not be diminished by an increase of partakers. Yea, your happiness will be augmented by it, if you are like-minded with angels—for they rejoice over every sinner that repenteth. So the first Christians, who had drunk so immediately at the spring-head of benevolence and love, could not keep the blessedness to themselves: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

NOVEMBER 30.

"*This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.*"—Gen. v. 29.

This leads us back to the malediction denounced in consequence of sin—"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Lamech, who here complains of the ground, had been contemporary with Adam during more than fifty years; and therefore he had doubtless heard from him in what a happy condition man was originally placed in Eden, where indeed he dressed the garden, but without vexation or fatigue. How different from this delightful residence was the wide wilderness world in which he now was, where the spontaneous productions were only briers and thorns, while the good things he wished for could only be procured by wearisome efforts, and amidst frequent disappointments! Yet it seems strange that those who could settle wherever they chose, should talk of the difficulty of subsistence, and the hardships occasioned by the barrenness of the soil. Two things would contribute to this. They seem not to have been allowed animal food before the Flood; and therefore they depended for support entirely on the fruits of the earth. And they had not that skill in agriculture we have, nor many of those implements of husbandry which save and soften labour now. Men were therefore engrossed in the drudgery of clearing the soil from nuisances, turning it up by hand, fencing it off from beasts so numerous and near, manuring it, sowing it, reaping it, carrying it home, beating it out and preparing it for use under a thousand inconveniences—Lamech speaks like one weary of a life consumed not only in work, but *toil* to relieve the low wants of animal appetites—and having come in exhausted from the field, he takes up his new-born babe, and looking at the mother calls "his name (so Noah signifies) refreshment, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

It is obvious from hence that he expected for himself and others some relief, rest, or consolation from this child. What was it? And how is the expression to be understood? —"This same shall comfort us." First, we may take it as an emotion purely parental. Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. It is therefore natural to rejoice at their birth. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Jeremiah speaks of the man that brought tidings to his father, saying, "a man-child is born unto thee, thereby making his heart glad." And though children are certain cares and uncertain comforts, it seems—for the future is wisely concealed from our view—impossible for the parental heart not to indulge hopes as well as wishes. This same shall grow up into a pleasing companion—he shall continue our name and our family—he shall reward our expense and care by returns of gratitude and attention—and when we are old and grey-headed he shall be the stay and solace of age and infirmity. He may also increase the number of the faithful, and be a part of the seed which shall

serve the Redeemer. We are nursing this child for God; and what joy will it afford us to see him an heir of glory, walking in the truth, and a blessing to all around him!

Secondly, as a prophetical intimation of Noah's usefulness. Though he spake according to his natural affection, we have reason to believe he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore announces that this was to be an extraordinary child; a deliverer; one who should serve his generation, and prove a benefactor to the human race. Accordingly he not only, as Jarchi says, improved agriculture much, and reduced human labour, and planted vineyards, and produced wine which strengthens man's heart; but he prepared an ark for the salvation of any who would avail themselves of it. In him the race of mankind was revived after the Deluge. He was the father of the new world, and from his loins the whole globe was peopled. For his sake the face of the earth was renewed, and an assurance and a pledge obtained, of its safety from drowning, and of its enjoying the regular succession of the seasons. All this Lamech here foretold, and much of it he lived to see realizing: for he lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years. He therefore saw his son not only good but great; and as he lived till within five years of the Deluge, he could see the ark nearly finished, and would often doubtless go down to the scene, and sit and lean upon his staff, and watch the workmen. Noah also was a preacher of righteousness, and heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Thirdly, as an evangelical reference to the Saviour. Why should this be deemed a thing incredible or improbable? Even in these early days an expectation prevailed, derived from the promise of the woman's seed in Paradise, of a Redeemer of the human race, from the effects of the Fall; and many were raised up to hold him forth, imperfectly indeed, but really and usefully. God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This seed was immediately Isaac, but, finally and principally, the Messiah that should descend from him. Abraham therefore derived his hope and consolation from him, whom his son preceded as his ancestor, and prefigured as a type. It was the same with Lamech. He predicts that in his seed the world would experience a greater deliverance than from the Flood; and that one, of whom Noah was only an emblem, should be raised up to bless us with all spiritual blessings, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come. Say not, this all-important event was then too far off—a thousand years with the Lord are as one day. Say not, it is improbable that Lamech was enlightened enough to be aware of this—The prophets were not acquainted with the degree and extent of their own communications; and therefore studied them after they had delivered them; "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

And blessed be God, *we* know who is the true Noah. "His rest shall be glorious." "Come unto me," says he, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let nothing divert us from him. "This is the rest wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." Come what will—"THIS SAME SHALL COMFORT US."

DECEMBER 1.

"*We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*"—John i. 14.

HE had a glory; and he himself is called "the Lord of glory," and "the King of glory." But it was not the glory of this world, or the princes of this world, which come to naught. It was not such a glory as the Jews expected in the Messiah, the glory of a conqueror, striding from victory to victory, and setting his followers on the high places of the earth. It was not a glory arising from ambition and violence, from the desolation of war, from triumphs founded in blood, and from laurels drenched in the tears of widows and orphans. It was not the glory of a statesman working by policy, and ruling by cunning rather than rectitude, or even by fairer means—but a spotless, Godlike glory—"The glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

God has many children. Men are his offspring. All believers are the sons of God. Some in the household of faith have been exalted above their brethren in endowment and office. Solomon was great; but a greater than Solomon is here. Moses was faithful in all his house. Yet "this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Adam is called "the son of God" in a very peculiar sense, as he came immediately from the hands of God, perfect at once, and was the source, head, and representative of the human race. But "so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." Angels are sons of God: but "to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I be

gotten thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." "To which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" He is therefore—and we ask for no human definitions—we are afraid of them; the only begotten of the Father, in a meaning infinitely peculiar. He was the image of the invisible God; and could say, consistently with all the humility that distinguished him, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. And from henceforth ye know *him*, and have seen *him*." His attributes, his actions proclaimed Divinity. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God was seen in the face of Jesus Christ. His meekness, his patience, his benevolence, his readiness to forgive, are the perfections of the Being we adore and serve.

This glory had witnesses; and, says the Evangelist, we beheld it. They beheld it two ways: corporeally and spiritually. They beheld it even with their bodily senses. At his transfiguration they saw the lustre of his face, and the shining of his raiment, and the homage paid him by Moses and Elias; and heard the voice from the cloud, "saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." They often heard his own voice speaking as never man spake, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. They witnessed his miracles, and many more than they have recorded. They saw him heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and raise the dead to life. They saw his glory in the garden, in his feeling submission to the will of God; in his tender excuse for the infirmity of his disciples; in his power in healing the ear of Malchus; in his majesty in causing the soldiers to go backward and fall to the ground, when he only said, "I am he;" in his authority in stipulating for the safety of the Apostles, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." They saw his glory also in the wonders that dignified his death and his resurrection.

But this was not all. Some witnessed his miracles, and ascribed them to the power of the devil. He said to many who had attended him, Ye also have seen me and believed not. But it was otherwise with his own disciples. Concerning these he said; "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." How much of his glory they saw spiritually before the day of Pentecost we cannot determine. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified; that is, it was not given so abundantly. For he had doubtless partially enlightened the disciples before. At an earlier period our Lord said to Peter upon his confession, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven:" and this applied also to his brethren. Yet their views were in many things comparatively obscure, till the Spirit of truth had led them into all truth, as to the dignity of his person, the design of his death, and the nature of his kingdom. Then he was revealed in them. Then they knew in whom they had believed, and could say with the most determined confidence, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

But can we make this acknowledgment? Have we seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father? This is *possible*. We cannot indeed view him with our bodily eyes. But we may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. We can see him by faith. We have in our possession all that these original witnesses have told of him. We have his picture. In the four Gospels we can look into his very heart. "He that seeth the Son and believeth on him hath everlasting life."

And this perception of him is *necessary*. And if you have seen his glory, you have seen enough to fix and fill your minds, to produce self-abasement, to wean you from the world, to induce you to follow him whithersoever he goeth, to recommend him to others, and to pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." And if this be the case, you will soon have another and a nobler sight of it. You will see him as he is. You will behold his face in righteousness—For the prayer will be accomplished; "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to BEHOLD MY GLORY."

DECEMBER 2.

"*And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them; that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered: and they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the con*

gregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: and four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders."—Numb. vii. 1—9.

It was a sad censure and disgrace the Apostle was compelled to utter, when he said, "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." But it is delightful to see a public spirit in religion. And we have some noble instances of it recorded, not only in the New Testament, but the Old. In reading history these are the same to a Christian, as the meeting with a few green and watered spots to a traveller in a dry and sandy desert.

With regard to the fact before us we may observe, First, the donors. They were "the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered." This was well. They who are placed above others are peculiarly bound to take the lead in every thing moral and religious. They are under an obligation of gratitude to their benefactor, who has distinguished and indulged them. They are also under an obligation of justice, which requires them to meet the design of their elevation, which is, not the indulgence of their vanity, pride, and selfishness, but their glorifying God, and serving their generation according to his will. They should consider their resources and influences as talents, and use them as stewards of the manifold grace of God. Having more means and opportunities of usefulness than others, they will be the more guilty if they neglect or misimprove them. When wicked, they never perish alone. Children justify themselves by the example of their parents, servants by that of their masters, people by that of their ministers, and subjects by that of their rulers; and one sinner thus circumstanced destroyeth much good. But all are not so. Some are preserved amidst the snares of wealth, rank, and authority; and feel it to be their honour and pleasure to do good. And we see from the offerers before us how wrong all general and indiscriminate reflections are. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but there are some; and in our day there is no little movement among the higher classes in life.

Secondly, their offering. They "brought before the Lord six covered wagons, and twelve oxen: a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox." As twelve oxen were necessary, every prince could give one but as six wagons only were required, had each wagon been given by an individual, six only could have been gratified; but by uniting in pairs, all the twelve could equally share in the honour and pleasure.

Their use was to aid in the present service of the tabernacle. That service would not be needful when the ark had a fixed abode in Zion: but in its movable state assistance was required, in transporting it from place to place. These oxen therefore were to draw the vehicles containing the appendages pertaining to the sanctuary; and hence the wagons were covered, or, as we should say, tilted; not only to preserve the sacred furniture from vulgar and rude gaze, but to keep them from dust, and rain, and sunshine, and all the injuries of the weather.

Thirdly, the manner of their giving. There is no doubt but these oxen were excellent, strong to labour, and well trained: and that the wagons were of the best materials and workmanship, and well covered, in honour of their destination and use. We know some who, if they could not have escaped giving, would have looked out the leanest beast, and the least valued vehicle they had. And we know the complaint brought by God himself against the Jews in the days of Malachi: "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it: and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." But we may fully presume that these pious donors presented what they deemed the best they had. And we are sure they gave *readily:* for they did it the very "day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it." They gave as soon as the things were wanted; yea, before they were wanted, in order to be in readiness. Here was no hanging back, hoping the offering might be dispensed with; or to see what others did first, to save as much as possible their pocket, without losing their credit. They required no excitement, no sermon full of motives from Moses or Aaron to work upon their feelings—They were volunteers; self-moved; they chose to be examples rather than followers. God loveth a cheerful giver.

Fourthly, the acceptance and application of the present. At first Moses seems to have hesitated whether they should be used in the service of the tabernacle. The reason probably was, that God had given him before a model of every thing, and had said, "See that thou make every thing according to the pat-

tern showed thee in the Mount." But the pattern did not extend to this, and here he was without orders. The thought had sprung from the pious reflection of these men; and it is not necessary that every minute circumstance in the administrations of religion should be prescribed; many things, or the world could not contain the books that would be written, may be, and must be, left to expediency. Thus David established the orders of singers; and thus the Jews, after their captivity, formed synagogues, in which our Saviour often taught and worshipped. Moses therefore is enjoined to receive this donation, and consecrate it to the purpose for which it was designed: "Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites."

But see how they were distributed; for this will be found very instructive. To "the sons of Gershon he gave" but "two wagons and four oxen:" but this is said to be "according to their service;" for they had only to carry the drapery, the curtains, and hangings. To "the sons of Merari he gave four wagons and eight oxen, according to *their* service;" for they had to bear the heavy luggage, the boards, pillars, and sockets; and these were heavy. "But to the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was, that they should bear upon their shoulders." We may hence observe, First—That there is a difference in the services to which we are called. Some of them are more public, and some more private: some more painful, and some more pleasing. One serves God more relatively, another more personally—His work, so to speak, is mere shoulder-work. They have no outward resources: no wagons or oxen—They cannot command others by their authority or their abilities, but they can give *themselves*. If they are without substance, they can act, they can collect, they can teach in a Sunday-school, they can visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?"

Secondly, there is a proportion between our work and our strength: and "according to" our "service" is the assistance provided. Every Christian may claim Asher's promise; "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days so shall thy strength be." "He will not suffer you," says the Apostle, "to be tempted above that ye are able." And has not this been exemplified in the experience of his people in all ages? And have not we found it true? Let the thought at once annihilate every tendency to envy—or despair. Say not, Ah! such an one has four wagons and eight oxen! But see what he has to carry! You may not know the extent and degree of his burden: but the Lord knows; and therefore as the sufferings abound the consolations abound also. Be not afraid of any work or trial that lies before you. View the things which would discourage you, not simply, as they are in themselves, but relatively to your resources. There is nothing to which he will call you for which he has not made provision; and his grace will be sufficient for you, for his strength is made perfect in weakness. What is it for your difficulties or duty to be increased, if there be an increase of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

DECEMBER 3.

"*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.*"—Heb. v. 8.

The title here given to the Lord Jesus is applied to him *peculiarly*, and in a way of *dignity*. This is obvious from the very reasoning of the Apostle: for there is nothing wonderful in the supposition that *a* son should learn obedience by suffering—for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But the marvellousness is that *such* a Son should learn obedience by the things which *he* suffered.

Here let us keep close to the Scripture, and not pry into things which we have not seen. All mankind are the offspring of God, as he is the real author of their being, the framer of their bodies, and the former of their spirits within them. Adam is called "the son of God," as he was immediately produced by his power, and made after his image, not only in dominion, but knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, in distinction from all the inferior orders of his creatures. This likeness was soon lost by the Fall, and hence the term soon became in the Scriptures a religious appellation, serving to discriminate the godly from the wicked. When all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth, the descendants of Seth are called "the sons of God," because they worshipped, served, and resem-

bled him. Christians therefore obtain this honour in the New Testament: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." They are so by adoption and regeneration. The angels, those pure intelligences unencumbered with our flesh and blood, are also thus characterized: "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." But "unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." We leave the conclusion to yourselves—It *must* lead you to consider him "above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

And what does the Apostle affirm concerning him? He suffered; he obeyed; he learned. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

He *suffered*. He was "a man of sorrows," as if he derived his very character from them, "and acquainted with grief." Grief is always our neighbour, and sometimes our visitor; but it was his companion, and never separated from him till he gave up the ghost. Who can describe or imagine the greatness and the number of "the things he suffered"—in his outward estate? in his reputation? in his connexions? in his body? in his soul? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto his sorrow!

He *obeyed*. His obedience was very superior to ours. It was complete and universal. He did not sin. He omitted no duty. He always did the things that pleased the Father; and therefore at the close of the whole he could confidently make the appeal, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do." His obedience also appeared in his submission. We are required to obey God as our governor, as well as our lawgiver, and to acquiesce in his appointments as well as fulfil his orders. And here, alas! how often do we fail! It is no easy thing to bear sickness, to resign a pleasant situation, to part with a beloved child—to obey a correcting God! How often we rebel or repine! But without a murmuring word or feeling, he submitted to all the pleasure of his heavenly Father, saying, Not my will, but thine be done. Even his death and all that led to it was an act of obedience—He "was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God;" and that will required the sacrifice of himself as an offering for sins. Hence, as he was going forth to agonize in the garden, and suffer upon the cross, he said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do; arise, let us go hence."

He *learned*—"He learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Many do not. Experience, says Franklin, is a dear school, but fools will learn in no other. The truth is, *they* will not learn even in this. Only wise men, says Burke, ever derive wisdom from experience. Experience itself is thrown away upon others, like seed sown upon a rock or the sand of the sea. Under what an expensive course of tuition have some passed? Yet what have they learned? May we not say of them, in the language of Jeremiah, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." When this is the case, the incorrigibleness is punished in one of these two ways: God either abandons the culprit, saying, He is joined to idols, let him alone; or, if he does not remove the rod, he turns it into a scorpion. He increases the severity and the grievousness of the strokes till the threatening is awfully accomplished; "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." At the most distant danger of which, the Israelite indeed falls upon his knees and cries, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." And says David, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest out of thy law." This is the design of affliction, and the effect of it when sanctified. Some of our lessons have cost us much, but they have not cost us too much if we have learned obedience by the things we have suffered.

But this does not apply to the Son of God precisely in the same way it does to us. The distinction is this. He learned obedience by the things he suffered, but he did not learn to obey. David's afflictions humbled his pride, banished his sloth, roused his attention, and excited him to study the will of God; and therefore he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes"—Thus he learned by his sufferings to obey. But Jesus stood in need of no such stimulations and auxiliaries as these. He knew what was required of him, and was always perfectly ready to do it. *His* sufferings therefore were not the cause of his obedience, but only the occa-

sion: they did not produce the disposition, but only afforded opportunities for the exercise and the display of it. The gold was sterling before, but the fire proved it: the field did not make the hero, but proclaimed him. Yet he could not have learned what obedience was, how trying it is, especially in affliction, and what grace it requires, without experience. But *thus* he knew it not in theory only, but in reality, as a man learns the taste of medicine by tasting it, or as a man knows what it is to travel by travelling.

DECEMBER 4.

"*When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*"—Job xxiii. 10.

Job *was* indeed tried, and perhaps next to his Saviour could say, Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow!—But he remarks three things with regard to it.

First, the author: "*He* hath tried me." In none of his sufferings did he ever lose sight of the hand of God. When the Chaldeans and the elements had spoiled him of all his substance, he said, "The *Lord* hath taken away." And when, in addition to this, he was deprived of his children, and health, and friends, and he seemed to have no comfort left, he said, "*Thou* hast taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces." And "is there an evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" How much is that man to be pitied who does not connect with all the events of life the providence of that God without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground, and by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered! How consolatory to reflect, "I am not in a fatherless world; I am not the child of neglect; I am not the sport of chance; I am not at the mercy of my foes—they could have no power against me, except it was given them from above; they are chained, and he holds the chain—The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath will he restrain—The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?"

Secondly, the termination: "*when* he hath tried me, I *shall come forth*." I am now in "the midst of trouble," but I shall not remain there. He doth not afflict willingly. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion. He hath said, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." The time may seem long, but I shall not be detained a moment longer than the case requires. He hath appointed the hour of deliverance, and his time is the best time; for he is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. "We went," says the Church, "*through* fire and *through* water, but thou *broughtest* us out into a wealthy place"

Thirdly, the benefit: "when thou hast tried me I shall come forth *as gold*." And how is this? Gold comes forth *proved*. Thus we read of "gold tried in the fire:" and David says, "Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried." The design of affliction is not to increase God's knowledge of us—this is perfect already; but to make us better known to others and to ourselves; to discover and display the reality and the degree of grace; to *prove* whether we are humble enough to stoop, and patient enough to wait: whether we can love God when he corrects, and trust in him when he hideth himself.

Gold comes forth *purified*. A stranger to the process of refining, when he saw it melting in the intenseness of the fire, might suppose that it was likely to be destroyed, or at least that it must be injured. And it is reduced in size, and something is taken away from it—but it is only the dross, and this is better removed than retained. And who hath said, "I will also purge away the dross, and take away all thy tin." "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up." What did the three Hebrews lose in the flames? Only their bonds. When they were thrown in, they were bound; "and they fell down *bound* into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." In this state they could not have moved. But, without the smell of fire passing upon their bodies, their bonds were burnt, and they were seen walking with the Son of God, Much like this Young sings.

> "Our hearts are fasten'd to the world,
> With strong and various ties;
> But every trouble cuts a string,
> And urges us to rise."

Gold comes forth *prepared*. It is then fitted to be coined for circulation, or framed into vessels of ornament and use; and now rendered capable of a lustre which it had not before. So Christians are improved and advanced by their trials, and can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "For a season, if needs be," says Peter, "ye are in heaviness." "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Job speaks with confidence of that blessed result, before he had realized it. So may every believer. For "*all* the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth." And "we *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God"

DECEMBER 5.

And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire."—Jer. xxxviii. 6.

HERE he was not as "an evil-doer," but "for righteousness sake," and a faithful discharge of his duty. "And this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." The condition was dreadful, owing to the depth, and dreariness, and unwholesomeness, and foulness of the place; and the heart revolts at the thought of the sufferer, sinking lower and lower in the mire by every effort to raise himself up, parched with thirst, fainting with hunger, gasping for free air, and a stone being laid upon the mouth of the pit, excluding not only ventilation, but light! And the design of the princes was, that he should not only suffer there, but die of privation and disease; longing to rid themselves of their reprover, but fearing that a public execution would excite popular pity—Thus Herod sent and beheaded John in prison—And how many fearful secrets of this kind will be divulged when He maketh inquisition for blood!

Who could think that a number of persons in higher and more refined life, and commonly called "the better sort of people," would be able to leave a fellow-creature, a prophet of the Lord, to perish by so lingering and frightful a death! Lord, what is man? But all things come alike to all. No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. These wicked princes are in their palaces, and Jeremiah is in the miry dungeon. But where is the God of judgment? We shall presently see—"Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him, in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

We are not told *here*, what Jeremiah did; but he himself has informed us in one of his lamentations. "They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not." And what was the consequence? The wrath of man praises God: the evil is overruled for good; and the prophet learns by experience that the Master he served, commanded the issues from death, and was a very present help in trouble.

What a scene here opens! "Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die." Here we find how the Lord can raise up helpers for his people from quarters the most unlikely. He "knoweth how to deliver the godly;" and often renders his interposition as marvellous as it is relieving. Here we also see that the Lord has his hidden ones, and that they are frequently found where we should little think of looking after them—"Surely the fear of God," said Abraham, "is not in this place;" but it was there, and prevented the sin which would otherwise have been committed. Abijah had some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. Daniel was the prime minister of Darius, and yet worshipped God three times a day. Yea, we read of saints even in Cæsar's household! Zedekiah's court was a very wicked one, yet here was a man of principle, and of religious principle, found in it. But who was he? A foreigner, an "Ethiopian," and probably a negro. Call nothing common or unclean. The first may be last, and the last may be first. While all the princes and the men of Judah were destitute of humanity and piety, this Ethiopian abounded in both.

He had a place at court which secured him ease and comfort. Such persons commonly feel little disposition to exert themselves for the distresses of others, for they know not the heart of a sufferer. It is in the school of affliction we learn to weep with them that weep. But it is probable that Ebed-melech had been in trouble himself. However this may be, his interference was unsolicited and prompt, as soon as ever "he heard that they had put Jeremiah into the dungeon." And he showed herein no little courage as well as kindness. He had much to lose, and the princes were likely to unite against him, for they were all the determined enemies of Jeremiah, and their malice made them ready for any mischief, and their influence was great; and the king to whom he appealed was then sitting in the gate, and therefore he had to go to him openly. But conviction nerves a man to his purpose, and there is no fear in love.

And his application was successful. The king complied with his desire. Let this encourage us in our pious and in our benevolent endeavours. We may succeed much better than we imagine. The individual that refuses at one time may yield at another.

Reflection may have changed him: some event or influence may have put him into a propitious frame. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not." All of us have some influence with others, and how seldom do we exert it as we ought—especially when we consider that the hearts of all are in the hand of the Lord, and he can turn them whithersoever he pleaseth!

DECEMBER 6.

"*So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm-holes, under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.*" —Jer. xxxviii. 11—13.

David had said, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." And two instances are recorded in the Scripture to encourage us, as a kind of first-fruits. The one is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles: "A man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning; and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet." Philip joined him, instructed him, and baptized him: "and he went on his way rejoicing." The other was found ages before, in the corrupt court of Zedekiah. We have seen, in the preceding exercise, how this pious and humane Ethiopian had nobly distinguished himself, by applying to the king on the behalf of Jeremiah. Having obtained the royal permission to release him from the dismal dungeon, and being furnished with thirty men for the purpose, we here see how he accomplished the work.

If such circumstances are deemed unworthy of attention, let the Spirit of God be condemned for recording them, and not the preacher for noticing them. We are here led forcibly to remark, that nothing should be wasted, not only in poor, but in higher life. Here we find, even in "the house of the king, and under the treasury," that is, in the storeroom, old and injured apparel, laid by for use. And let it not be forgotten, that when our Saviour had shown his power by multiplying five loaves and two fishes into more than a sufficiency to supply the whole multitude, he then, even then, enforced a lesson of economy and frugality; and said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," to show that ability and plenty are not to justify, or even excuse any degree of wastefulness. It is by guarding, not only against needless buying, but heedless spending, that the capacity for beneficence is to be enlarged. Our resources are diminished, not only by pride and indulgence, but by want of regulation and negligence. How is it that some, with a very limited income, not only provide things honest in the sight of all men, but have to give to him that needeth!

There is little charity in giving away what we cannot use ourselves; but it is the most shameful uncharitableness *not* to do it. Yet to mention only one instance—How often, in gardens, have we seen vegetables perishing, for which many a family of hungry children would have been thankful. For we should reflect on the degrees of exigency, and remember that what is of no value to us may be of most pressing importance to others, even to the leavings of the plainest table, and the remnants of the poorest wardrobe.

Jeremiah seems to have been a large heavy man; and the ropes might have pained and bruised him; and the dungeon was deep. Ebed-melech therefore provides a softening, and lets it down, and desires him to put it under his arm-holes under the cords. We should see from this example, not only to do good, but to relieve with tenderness. As much often depends upon the manner of conferring a benefit, as upon the thing itself: we are therefore by love to serve one another, and to be not only charitable, but pitiful and courteous. We have seen some refusing with more kindness than others have given; the plaintive countenance, the melting eye, the soothing voice, showing at the time that it was not the will, but the power that was wanting. How much a female adds to the impression of her relief, by the delicacy with which she dispenses it! the manner as well as the principle of charity may render it *a grace*.

But our love is to abound in knowledge and in all judgment. We therefore, Finally, see the prudence as well as the kindness of this good man. Though he had drawn him up, he did not urge him to escape, but let him "remain in the court of the prison." He did this for two reasons. First, there he would be more under the king's protection, than if he was immediately set at large. And, Secondly, there he would be more likely to be better provided for in the straitness of the dearth, as we see from the end of the foregoing chapter, when the king ordered him to abide there before his wretched confinement: "Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until

all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison."

DECEMBER 7.

"*Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey into thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord.*"—Jer. xxxix. 15—18.

It is observable that Jeremiah himself was charged with this consolatory message to Ebed-melech, who had acted so nobly as his friend, and obtained his deliverance from the dungeon. Nothing could have been more agreeable and delightful to his feelings than to be the medium of such a communication; for grace by making a man humble always makes him grateful; and though his praise is principally due to the Author of all his mercies, he will not overlook the instruments.

The address implies the apprehension of Ebed-melech, yea, it is expressly said he was "afraid." Of whom? Of the princes whose doings he had opposed and censured? or the Chaldeans that were now encompassing the city? It is not possible to determine this; neither is it necessary. But while he is informed that the words concerning Jerusalem should be accomplished, and that he should witness it, he receives the assurance; "But I will deliver *thee* in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee."

Behold the value and importance of life, and see how able the Lord is to secure it even in the midst of general calamity and desolation; according to the promise; "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." The preservation of Noah in the Deluge, of Lot in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the Israelites in Goshen, from the plagues of Egypt, and of the mourners in Ezekiel from the men with the slaughter weapons; all these show that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

If Ebed-melech believed this declaration, he would not only dwell safely, but be in quiet from the fear of evil, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. When we consider the structure of our frame, and the numberless dangers to which we are exposed, we cannot reckon upon living a day or an hour to an end, without the Preserver of men. But all our times are in his hand, and he makes us immortal till our work is done—

"Hast thou not given thy word
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord
To keep my mortal breath.
I'll go and come,
Nor fear to die,
Till from on high
Thou call me home."

But see the reason assigned for his gracious regard: "Because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." It was really for his kindness to Jeremiah; but God notices, not the practice, but the principle which had produced it, and without which he could not have been actuated to do as he had done. Men judge of motives by actions: God judges of actions by motives; and the motive is more with him than every thing else. So indeed it is with us as far as we can ascertain it in any instance of conduct towards ourselves. Hence we value a trifle if it springs from real regard, more than a much larger present if it arises from selfishness. *We* may indeed be mistaken in our constructions, but God is not mocked, his judgment is always according to truth. The case before us is not a solitary one. We should have commended the humanity and humility of the Centurion; and the prayer and perseverance of the Syrophenician woman: but our Lord only spake of their faith.

Some people always seem afraid of faith, as if it were hardly compatible with holiness and morality; whereas, it is the medium, the origin of them; it is the spring of these streams, it is the root of these branches. It is in every respect operative; but it peculiarly works by love. He is the most likely to show mercy who has received mercy; to forgive who has been forgiven.

But the whole shows us that Ebed-melech had no reason to repent of his work of *faith* and labour of love towards the Lord's servant. Jeremiah could not repay him; but this was so much the better for his benefactor. This is the very reason which our Saviour adduces to excite attention to the poor: "For they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." It is finely said, "He that giveth to the poor *lendeth* unto the Lord." A man does not

think of returning what is given him, but if he has any sense of honour and of justice he will not retain what is lent. And would the Lord borrow and not repay? He has bound himself not only to accept, but to reward the services of his people, and the reward is not the less great, or the less certain, because it is a reward not of debt, but of grace. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

DECEMBER 8.

"*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*"—John ix. 25.

The corporeal change with which this poor man had been blessed, is the spiritual experience of every real Christian—He was blind, but now sees.

And like him too the Christian may *know* it.

We may also observe a resemblance in the *limitation* of the knowledge itself—It extends to *one* thing: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." But this is the main thing; and to know this is to know enough, without being able to determine a number of particular circumstances. For instance: it is not necessary to know the precise time of the change. Who knows precisely when the day begins, or which be the first beams that reach our horizon? Yet one thing we know, that the sun is rising; it is dawn, it is day. We know when spring is arrived, and yet who can fix the exact boundary by which it passed from winter, and the hour, the day, the week, when it will issue in summer! unless in the artificialness of the almanac. Who perceived when he first began to live naturally; yet he knows that he hungers and thirsts, and eats and drinks, and lives and moves, and has a being.

Neither is it necessary to be able to know the particular instrumentality employed; whether an afflictive event, or a good book, or the admonition of a friend, or the preaching of the word. Sometimes there is such a combination and blending of excitements and impressions, that it is impossible to specify which, in the aggregate, was the most powerful or decisive. Whatever be the means, and they are various, the excellency of the power is of God; and it is enough for us to know that the work is done, and to acknowledge that he has done it.

To which we may add the manner in which it has been accomplished. In some cases it is more sudden; in others more slow. The Lord addresses one man in thunder; he whispers to another in a small still voice. Here he awakens fear and terror; there he draws with the bands of a man and the cords of love. What a difference was there between the conversion of the jailer, and the opening of the heart of Lydia: and between the revelation of the Saviour to Saul of Tarsus, and to Cornelius! Yet in all these instances the result was the same. Two inferences may be drawn from hence. The one regards others. How careful should we be not to disown persons as religious characters, and keep them back from the table of the Lord, because they are unable to furnish a minute narrative of the dealings of God with their souls, while they walk as becometh the Gospel. The other regards ourselves. It is better indeed to err on the safe side; and to be too fearful rather than self-secure. It is an awful thing to decide on our spiritual condition; and, considering the consequences of mistake, should never be done without much consideration. Yet, on the other hand, decision is unspeakably desirable, and we should not refuse to be comforted, and under a feeling of humility and diffidence, become ungrateful, and deny what God has wrought in us. We are commanded to examine ourselves, and to prove whether we are in the faith; but this is best done, not by nice and curious inquiries with regard to the influences of the Holy Spirit, but by observing the tendency of their operation, and judging by their effects—And happy is he who, whatever he may be ignorant of besides, can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

And remark what a confidence the man derived from his consciousness of this one thing. These unbelievers wished and endeavoured to confound him; but their questions and their cavils had no weight with *him*. He did not consider himself competent to dispute with them; nor did he attempt to consider every objection their prejudices urged—But he had —he felt one invincible, undeniable argument —"This," says he, "is sufficient for me." You say, he is a sinner—Is it likely a sinner would be so honoured of God as he has been? Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man was not of God, he could do nothing. This however I must leave with you—I know what he has done for me, and cannot be mistaken—whether he be a sinner I know not; "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

A Christian indeed is not an enthusiast. He despises no kind of evidence; and he wishes that his religion may always appear what it really is, a reasonable service. But he that believeth hath the witness in himself. Like this man, has a satisfaction derived from

experience. He has received the truth in the love and efficiency of it. He has felt its power and blessedness. Such a man could be safely trusted among infidels. They may scoff and ridicule; they may even perplex him; but they cannot induce a conviction contrary to his views and feelings. He has a certainty, out of which he can neither be laughed or reasoned. His heart is established with grace. And thus also he is secure, not only from infidelity, but heresy; and cannot be drawn away from the truth as it is in Jesus, or the peculiar doctrines of divine grace. With him they are not mere notions, but principles. They are spirit and they are life. They sanctify, quicken, refresh his soul. If a man who sees could be introduced among a people entirely blind, they would consider him a liar or a madman, when he told them what he saw. Yet though he would not contemn them because of their blindness, but feel pity instead of pride, he would be in no danger of yielding to their opinion: he would know that he spoke the words of truth and soberness—He would know that though they were blind, he saw.

This also qualifies a man for dealing with others in divine things. It excites his zeal, and enables him to speak with earnestness, because he can speak without hesitation or doubt. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

This also yields him a prop against despair, and a cordial under discouragement. He feels that he is far from what he ought to be, and wishes to be. "I have much," says he, "to humble me, but I am not without cause for thankfulness. He *has* made me to differ from others, and from myself once. I *know* he has enabled me to see the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the worth of his grace. I know I love his salvation; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—And if he were pleased to kill me, he would not have shown me such things as these."

DECEMBER 9.

"*He shall see of the* TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL, *and shall be satisfied.*"—Isaiah liii. 11.

THIS verse contains an epitome of the whole chapter; and the chapter contains an epitome of the whole Gospel. For what is the Gospel—but "the testimony of Jesus?" And what does this testimony essentially include—but "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow?" And if "the angels desire to look into these things"—how much more should we, to whom they are not only true, and wonderful, and sublime—but infinitely important and necessary! Let me therefore indulge in three meditations on this all-interesting subject.

The allusion is obvious. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." A comparison should never be pressed beyond its lawful bounds. The attempt made to force too much out of it, not only renders it absurd, but weakens it, and the spirit flies off evaporated in particles. It should suffice here to observe, that there is a strong and striking resemblance between the delivered mother and the risen Saviour. In each case there is suffering. In each case the suffering is followed by pleasure. And in each case the pleasure is deemed the recompense of the suffering—The birth of the child repays the throes of the mother; and the salvation of the Church satisfies the Saviour: "He shal see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.

The TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL.

From ignorance and the degree of interest which things acquire in their relation to ourselves, every sufferer is prone to think that *his* endurings are peculiar and superior. Jesus could say with infinite propriety, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Two things here intimate the greatness of his passion. First, the term by which it is expressed. "Travail"—not trouble—but "travail." And, secondly, the principal seat of it; "his soul"—"The travail of his *soul.*" The distress of the soul is the soul of distress.

Some persons are not qualified to enter into a comparison between corporeal and mental affliction. They are a kind of human animals. They are masses of flesh and blood. They have senses, and passions, and appetites; and little else. They lie down and rise up; they sleep and wake; they hunger and thirst—But they never suffer, unless when they have nothing to eat, or when they cry out with bodily pain. They are strangers to all that interior of woe which to feeling minds renders the world a wilderness, more than the thorns and briers without. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?" While all is calm and firm within, external trials are borne with comparative ease. *Then* we may be "troubled on every side, yet not distressed;" like a ship in the sea, which does not sink by the water around it, but only by what gets through and gets in.

But there are some who have not only "fightings without," but "fears within."

They know what inward anguish and depression mean. Ah! says David, "My bones are vexed, my soul is also sore vexed"—"O, my God, my soul is cast down within me." And how was it with his Son, whom he yet in spirit calls his Lord! His sufferings were "the travail of his soul." Not that he was free from other afflictions. With regard to outward distresses, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. But even his external sufferings derived much of their pressure from the sensibility of his mind, for he was all feeling. Some are little affected, even with bereavements: but he, at the grave of Lazarus, groaned in spirit and wept. Some seem careless of reputation; but he said, "reproach hath broken my heart." Some when "stricken" are not "grieved," and "have made their faces harder than a rock;" but he "in the days of his flesh made supplications with strong cryings and tears." But what led him to exclaim on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What made him in the garden, before the hand of man had yet touched him, to be "sore amazed and very heavy?" What led him to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death?" while "his sweat was as it were drops of blood falling to the ground?"

"The thought of his approaching crucifixion," say some. If so, what becomes of the pre-eminence of his example? We can fetch many from history who had to endure more torturing and lingering agonies—And yet they rejoiced in the prospect, left their prisons singing, kissed the instrument of their pain, and thanked the executioner. How did Bradford, when informed that he was to be burnt at the stake the following day, fall upon his knees and praise God for an honour he had so long waited for? When a popish priest said to Hooper at the place of execution, "I am truly sorry to find you here;" the martyr replied, "O man, keep thy sorrow to thyself, and mourn over thine own wickedness. I am well blessed by God, and to die for the sake of Christ is sweet to my soul." Is then the servant above the master, or the disciple above his Lord? Here—and we will venture to say, here alone, can be found a complete and satisfactory solution. They had Calvary before them, but not Gethsemane. They had to endure the cross, but not the curse. They died by men, but not for them. They had not to bear the sins of many: they had not to bear their own sins—not one of their own sins—or they would have sunk down under the burden. But he bare our sins in his own body on the tree. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. HIS SOUL WAS MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN.

DECEMBER 10.

"*He* SHALL SEE *of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*"—Isaiah liii. 11.

SOMETHING therefore was to be *derived* from the travail of his soul. It was the salvation of sinners. To show that this infinite good results from his suffering, he compares his dying to the sowing of seed, which *dies*, and *then* produces. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here we are reminded of our obligations to him. If we are reconciled unto God, it is by the death of his Son: if we are redeemed from the curse of the law, it is because he was made a curse for us. The blessing, though free to us, was beyond expression expensive to him. He accomplished it, not by a mere volition of his will, or an exertion of his power, but by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

"He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
To raise us to his throne;
There 's not a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan."

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

While this blessedness *is* the travail of his soul, so we find he can enjoy the *sight* of it. A child, when born, may be spared, and may grow up, and be acknowledged as the offspring of her who bare him; but if she dies, though others see the travail of the mother, she herself does not. She is laid low in the dust; and in vain her infant goes to her grave—His cries, if oppressed, cannot reach her ears, nor, if well treated, can the news gladden her heart—Her son comes to honour, but she knoweth it not; and he is brought low, but she perceiveth it not of him. So it was with Rachel: "Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also." And she had a son, and he became a patriarch, and the head of a tribe; but she *saw* it not: for she only sighed out a name expressive of her disappointment and sorrow—she called his name Benoni, and expired. So would it have been with Jesus, had he not rose and revived. Whatever blessings he procured for us by dying, he could not have seen the application and enjoyment of them, had he remained in the grave. But he could not be holden of it. It was said of him, He shall live. A seed shall serve him. And he shall *see* his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

For there is a certainty in his realizing this vision—"He *shall* see of the travail of his soul." It is often spoken of as a reward insured by promise and stipulation. Thus it is

said; "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Let it not be objected, that he himself says, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain." For here he complains as the moral agent, as the preacher of the word, as the minister of the circumcision. But this does not apply to the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. This would not allow of his suffering at an uncertainty. Having performed the awful condition, it would have been unfaithful in God to have withholden the remuneration suspended upon it; especially as he died in dependence upon it, and in expectation of it. It was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, and despised the shame.—To which we may add, that he is fully in possession of resources sufficient to enable him to acquire all his rights, and realize all his wishes. As yet we see not all things put under him, but we see him, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. We see him with power over all flesh: with all power in heaven and in earth —able therefore to counteract all the designs of his enemies, and to make them subservient to the accomplishment of his own—able to take the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession —able to subdue Paganism, and the false prophet, and the man of sin—able to take away the veil from the heart of the Jews, and induce them to look upon him whom they have pierced, and to mourn for him—able to root up in his churches every plant which his heavenly Father hath not planted—able to increase a thousand fold all the excellences and usefulness of his people. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."

DECEMBER 11.

"*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and* SHALL BE SATISFIED."—Isaiah liii. 11.

NOTHING is more trying and mortifying than to labour without success, especially when great difficulties are encountered, and great sacrifices incurred. But how pleasing is it to the husbandman, after manuring, and ploughing, and sowing, to go forth and see, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear; and when he has borne the burden and heat of the day, in harvest to behold the precious grain safely housed in the garner! How delightful must it be to the warrior after his marchings, and privations and all the perils of the field, to return home in peace, and enjoy the spoils and rewards of victory! Or take the image to which Isaiah refers. How is the mother recompensed for her pain when she sees—a living child—her own—the pledge of mutual affection—the wearer of the father's name and image—an endeared creature depending upon herself—to be fed at her bosom—to be dandled on her knee—to be aided by her in all his attempts to walk and speak—a rational being unfolding new powers—and preparing for usefulness in the community—and who, unless he be a wretch, will pronounce no word through life with half the feeling he will say, "My mother!" But there have been days wherein it was said, "Blessed is the womb that bare not, and the paps that never gave suck." Many a "Rachel is weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not." Many an early grave is inscribed with, "Childhood and youth are vanity." But the pleasure of the Lord Jesus is liable to no such disappointment—"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be SATISFIED."

Let us dwell for a moment on this satisfaction. What can be so animating and improving? Paul says to the Thessalonians, "Ye are our glory and joy." Yet he and his brethren were only ministers by whom they believed even as the Lord gave to every man. But if converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their salvation, in how much higher a degree must they be so to him who is the sole author of it! When the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them, "He spake this parable unto them. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." We need not say, that this shepherd, who, instead of complaining of his wearisome and painful search, only exults in his success, is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. When he came to the well, he was not only thirsty, but hungry, and therefore his disciples went away into the city to buy meat. When they returned they spread it before him, saying, "Master, eat"—But he said unto them, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Upon which, looking at each other and wondering, they said, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" He then said, "My disciples, since you left me I have had an opportunity to enlighten and convert, by my grace, a poor sinful wretch who came here to draw

water; and she has left her vessel for my use; and has gone into the city to tell her neighbors; and is, as you see yonder, returning over the plain with a large number, who will receive my doctrine and become my followers. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. Ah! my disciples, this is food! There is no repast like the satisfaction of doing good—My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

And when he sees the travail of his soul, is he SATISFIED? Then behold his benevolence. The world knew him not: his own received him not. They persecuted him through life, and at length hung him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead, and he had the means to revenge himself—and it is said revenge is sweet. And it is sweet to a brute. It is sweet to a devil. But it is not sweet to a Christian mind. But it is sweet to exercise mercy, to pass by a transgression, to overcome evil with good. So Jesus derived his satisfaction not from the punishment of his enemies, but from their pardon, and deemed their happiness a recompense for all his sufferings.

Then we see the worth and importance of the salvation of the soul. We cannot always infer the value of a thing from the pleasure it yields. Little things please little minds. We read of some who rejoice in a thing of naught. We know how men make gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence: and yet a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. When therefore a work is performed, we wish to know the opinion of one who is a perfect judge—Is he satisfied with it? It is a strong proof of the importance of salvation that the angels of God rejoice over one sinner that repenteth: for we cannot imagine that a mere trifle would throw into ecstasy those beings who are proverbial for their knowledge. But it is a stronger proof still that it is the satisfaction of our Divine Redeemer himself. O that we estimated our souls as he estimates them! Every thing else would appear less than nothing and vanity, compared with their salvation.

Then we may enlarge our notions of the numbers of the saved. True benevolence is the most encroaching thing in the world. A generous heart is never satisfied; it is always planning, always desiring to do something more. And would *his* soul, which is compassion itself, be satisfied with a few that should be saved? How many must be made partakers of the benefit before he stays the process of mercy, and says, It is enough! If no more are called I am satisfied! But it is in reference to his claim and his disposition, that he is told by promise that his seed shall be as the stars of heaven, as the sand on the sea-shore, and as drops of dew.

Then here is encouragement for faith and hope. Under a sense of unworthiness and guilt, persons often fear whether he will receive them. But does he not invite them to come; and command them to come; and does he not complain that they will not come—yea, does he not assure them that it would yield him pleasure? We can therefore plead with you *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have offended him enough, grieved him enough: and surely if there be any thing by which you can yield him satisfaction, you are bound to do it. Let him then see you at his feet, and hear you crying, Lord, save, I perish—This will charm him as much as the songs of angels—It is the travail of his soul, and when he sees it he is satisfied.

Then we have here a noble example to follow. Let the same mind be in us. Let his joy be fulfilled in ourselves. Let us spare no pains; let us grudge no sacrifices in order to be useful. And let the satisfaction arising from it be our reward—"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

DECEMBER 12.

"*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*"—Jer. x. 23.

JEREMIAH *knew* this. It was not with him a matter of opinion or conjecture, but of certainty; and therefore he could address his conviction to God himself. "But he was a prophet, and might have derived his confidence from an immediate inspiration." But we have no reason to believe this. He derived his persuasion from five sources, which lie open to ourselves.

First, *dependence*. We are not our own, and therefore the right of direction does not belong to us, but to another, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; and who has an absolute claim to us.

Secondly, *ignorance*. Vain man would be wise, but he is born like a wild ass's colt. His powers are exceedingly limited; he is liable to a thousand prejudices and delusions; and cannot be safely trusted to discern and distinguish between good and evil, appearances and realities.

Thirdly, *observation*. Read all history. See the consequences of Lot's choosing the vale of Sodom, "because it was well watered." See the sin and embarrassment to which David was reduced, when he went to Gath: yet he was so convinced of the propriety of this fatal step, as to say, "there is nothing

better for me to do." Look around you. What are you continually meeting with, not only in the conduct of men, but in the mistakes even of good men?

Fourthly, *experience*. Can any one look back upon life, and attentively review the events that have befallen him; the enterprises in which he has been engaged; the anxieties, and hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows, which have excited and influenced him; and not be compelled to say, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps!"

Lastly, *revelation*. Here we have the testimony of the only wise God himself frequently interposed and expressed, in every kind of statement—"Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happeneth to them all." "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him." "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

So true is the doctrine before us. And who does not believe the truth of it? It is not the conviction we want, but the temper, the practice that becomes it, and which we might imagine would certainly be produced by it in rational creatures. But, alas! these rational creatures are also depraved creatures; hence they see and approve better things, and follow worse. Yet surely this knowledge should be *a principle*, and we ought to derive from it *gratitude*. Have we been preserved from the dangers to which we were once unknowingly exposed? Have we escaped the follies and evils into which wiser and better men than ourselves have fallen? Have we been sheltered and indulged in our course? Have we had comfort in our connexions, and success in our engagements? Let us not burn incense to ourselves, as if all this was owing to our own prudence, and caution, and care; but exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory; for thy mercy and thy truth's sake." It should also yield *submission*. We may pray with regard to an affliction, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" if we can add, with the Saviour, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Indeed we cannot know what the will of God is in any of our trials, till events discover it. But when it *is* discovered, we ought to bow to his pleasure; assured not only that he has a right to do what he will with his own, but that he is too righteous and kind to injure us, and knows infinitely better than we do what our welfare requires.

If too "the way of man is not in himself," it should check *presumptuousness*. This often appears in men with regard to their future expectations and designs. But wisdom says, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Hence James thus reproves a tradesman, not for any disposition to defraud and oppress, nor for the wish to improve his income; but for reckoning on the continuance of his being and his health, and success in business, as if no uncertainty could attend him, and forming his scheme without any consideration of God, on whom every thing relied: "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." The certain rich man, whose ground brought forth plentifully, said, "This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my good. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This is what *he* said—"But *God* said, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The fact should also teach us to *apply to God for direction* in serious and earnest prayer. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." He is able to do it: he is willing to do it; yea, he is engaged to do it, if you repair with the case to him. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

It is thus alone we can live happy in a miserable world, and be calm and confident in every disturbance or alarm. But this will enable the soul to dwell at ease. The remedy has been tried, and was never known to fail. And no wonder—It is of God's own appointing and prescribing. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established"

DECEMBER 13.

"*And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar*" —Numb. vii. 10.

These princes, "heads of the houses of their fathers," were twelve. Their offering

individually was this: "One silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering: one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense: one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering: one kid of the goats for a sin offering: and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year."

Some of these articles were for immediate use, such as the animals to be slain in sacrifice for burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings. Others were for fixed and standing use: such were the utensils to be employed in performing the service of the sanctuary. These were all of silver and gold. Was God to be served only in plate? The costliness was not for his pleasure, but for the sake of the people in an early and infantile state of the Church; to impress their imaginations; to remind them that he was "a great King;" and to teach them that they were to serve him with their best. The chargers were worth, in our money, sixteen pounds five shillings—the bowl fifteen pounds—the spoon, or ladle, seven pounds ten shillings. It is not possible to determine the value of the two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs; but the presentation of two hundred and four of such animals, and three hundred pounds in silver, and seventy-five pounds in gold, was at that period, and in their circumstances, a vast donation.

And here the first thing that strikes us is the capacity of these donors. We are amazed to think how they came by so much affluence as to be able to spare for even one offering so much treasure. They had all been oppressed and plundered in Egypt, and they were now in a wilderness, without merchandise, trade, or agriculture. But from whatever source, or whatever way their wealth had been acquired, they had it; it was lawfully their own; they would not have been pious at the expense of justice; and they knew that God abhors robbery for burnt offering. Those however who have riches commonly resolve to keep them; and as it is said that the ground is generally very barren about the silver and gold mines, so the wealthy often do less for the cause of God, not only comparatively, but really, than persons of less resources. But it was not so here. Who can help admiring the liberality of these men? And let it be observed, That they did this freely; they were not called upon to do it; it was not the effect of any excitement, but of the forwardness and willingness of their own minds. Nor was this the first time of showing their generosity. It had been evinced in two instances before this. The first was when the tabernacle was in framing. "Then they gave onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and spice, and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense." These were things much valued, and which could not be easily replaced. When, also, the tabernacle was fully set up, and anointed and sanctified with all the instruments thereof, "they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle." Yet after this, immediately after this, they came forward again with the expensive donation before us.

With regard to this presentation we may remark three things. First, all the offerings were precisely the same in kind, quantity, and value. But were the donors equally rich? This is not likely. Yet they were equally disposed; they felt an equal interest in the altar; and to prevent mortification on one side, and pride on the other, by pre-eminence or inferiority, they had agreed upon this measure. We differ in our stations and in our means, but though we do not give the same in fact, we may give the same in principle. The Lord looketh to the heart, and in his sight all who give proportionately give equally; and the poor may be as liberal as the rich.

Secondly. The offerings were not to be presented at once. The solemnity continued twelve days: "The Lord said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar." Wherefore was this? We are never more liable to mistakes than when we assign reasons for the conduct of the Supreme Being. Yet he has reasons for all he does. And may we not suppose that he would teach us to do every thing decently and in order? As the work of God should not be done in a careless, so neither in a hurried and confused manner. "Take time," says the proverb, "and you will have done the sooner;" and if not, you will surely have done "the better." May we not learn also that we are not to complain of the length and repetition of religious services? Here were twelve days of convocation immediately following each other. But did the pious Jews cry out, "What a weariness it is to serve the Lord? When will the work be over?" Those who love the things of God call them "their pleasant things;" and in going from one ordinance to another, they only go from strength to strength. And when health, or the engagements of duty, keep them back from going with the multitude to the sanctuary, in "their hearts are the ways of them." Again. By the protraction and the repetition of the services, they would be more noticed, and more remembered by the people, and especially by their children. To which we may add, That thus an equal honour would be put upon each tribe. Each had his own standard in the army, each had his

precious stone in the breastplate of Aaron, and each had a separate day for the presentation of his offering, according to the order in which they were to move, or encamp, beginning with Judah, and ending with Naphtali.

Thirdly, The account of each dedication is expressly given, and repeated in the very same words, without the least variation or abridgement. This swells the chapter to a great length. In reading it perhaps we have sometimes been ready to think the sameness tiresome; and to say, this might easily have been avoided if the sacred historian, after the recital of the offering of the first prince's offering, had said, and "so did the remaining eleven." But there is no vain repetition in the Scriptures. God would show that he was no respecter of persons; that he is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love; that a book is written before him, in which he records the services of *every* individual.

DECEMBER 14.

"*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*"—Heb. v. 9.

We are made perfect as sin is subdued in us, as holiness prevails, as we love the law of God, and find his service our delight. It is thus *we* are transformed by the renewing of the mind; and are changed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. But this was not the case with the Lord Jesus. He was the Holy One of God. He had in him nothing to mortify, nothing to eradicate, nothing to convert. And the term here does not refer to his personal perfection, but to his official. He stood in a peculiar relation to us, as the accomplisher of our recovery from the Fall; and for this a certain kind of process was necessary, by way of qualification; including his incarnation, abasement, and suffering. This is fully expressed in an earlier part of the Epistle, where it is said he was made "perfect through suffering;" and that "it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren." The same is more than implied in the words before us: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered;" and, in this way, "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." And it is by his poverty we are enriched; it is by his stripes we are healed; it is by his death we live. He was our Redeemer in order to be our righteousness and strength. He procured on the cross all that he applies on the throne.

The author of a work is very distinguishable from the means. And this is peculiarly the case in the work before us. The Scriptures, ministers, ordinances, providences, may all aid us in attaining salvation; but he is the author; neither is there salvation in any other: no man cometh unto the Father, but by him.

To be the author of some works is a disgrace; to be the author of others is a very little honour; but there are works which have gained for their performers the admiration and praises of nations, and of ages. To be the author of salvation, is to surpass every other agent, more than the sun differs from a glow-worm. All the angels of God, and they are good judges, exclaim at the sight of it with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All other deliverers and benefactors are as much below him in kindness and efficiency, as the body is inferior to the soul, and time to eternity.

He is the author of *eternal* salvation. Eternity would add dignity to a trifle. But what an importance does it attach, what a crowning glory and happiness, when it is added to our wishes and our hopes! What the world promises the votaries of riches, fame, and pleasure, is uncertain, short, vanishing: and they set their heart on that which is not. But you, O Christian, have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. You have a better and an enduring substance. Your salvation shall be for ever. For ever—absolutely. All other salvations are everlasting only by comparison. The various deliverances of the Jews terminated in fresh ruin; and they were again conquered, spoiled, and enslaved. But the believer is passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. The crown he obtains is a crown of glory, that cannot fade away. His portion is without any qualification of the term perfectly endless—His song will always be new: his blessedness always beginning. For ever—emphatically. The present system is too narrow and too short for its development and realization. There must be new heavens and a new earth. There must be an immortality of duration. It is to eternity this salvation principally looks. Eternity is the grand sphere of it. *There* its glories are to be displayed; *there* its treasures are to be possessed, *there* its blessings are to be enjoyed. And so shall we be for ever with the Lord.

But who will be the partakers of this salvation? "All," says the Apostle, "that obey him." Does he mean then to exclude from hope those who have hitherto been disobedient? Who then could be saved? Christians themselves will acknowledge, that they themselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient: and that it was after this the loving kindness of God their Saviour towards them appeared. And is not the language of the Gospel addressed to such? "Let the wicked

forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But the Apostle would intimate, that the salvation is a holy salvation; that though its blessings are derived entirely from grace, they can only be enjoyed in a state of obedience; that though this obedience is not the cause of the salvation, it is the accompaniment, and characterizes all those who are the subjects of it.

Do we then obey him? How *reasonable* is this obedience! But how *necessary* is it!

We cannot be ignorant of his will. We know that he commands us to believe on his name, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow him, to seek those things which are above. What is our practice, our disposition, our prayer with regard to all this? *Can* we say, sincerely and earnestly—

> "Make me to walk in thy commands,
> 'Tis a delightful road;
> Nor let my head, nor heart, nor hands,
> Offend against my God."

DECEMBER 15.

"*But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.*"—2 Kings iii. 15.

We have here a narrative of the expedition of Jehoram king of Israel against Moab. He drew into the enterprise not only the king of Edom, but Jehoshaphat the king of Judah; a good man, but who was here led into temptation, for which he would have perished, if the Lord had dealt with him after his desert. We are not to hate the irreligious, or refuse to do them good as we have opportunity; but with regard to unhallowed intimacy and alliances, we are to remember that evil communications corrupt good manners, and that as for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. This was not the first time Jehoshaphat had erred in the same thing. He had some years before joined with Ahab the father of Jehoram, and had paid dear for his folly. The proverb says, a burnt child dreads the fire. Even an animal, who has once suffered, will avoid the cause for ever after. But men are not equally wise—"Why will ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more."

To return. "So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" But was it the Lord's doing? The distress was from him, but not the cause. But so it is; "the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." Yet a godly man will differ from others, even in a common mistake or calamity; and "Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" He should have consulted before he took a step, both as to the war itself, and the direction they were to take. It was thus David always did, and prospered. Yet it was better done late than entirely neglected. We have also here an image of what frequently takes place. God's servants are not thought of in case, prosperity, and health: but when conscience is alarmed, when trouble comes, when sickness and death threaten—then where is the minister? Send for the minister!

But how came Elisha here? In such a place! In such company! He was not here as the king's chaplain, or the army's chaplain; he was deemed by both the troubler of Israel. It is probable, as God designed to put honour upon him, that he was there by a divine impulse. However this may be, he *was* there; for "one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah." Upon this Jehoram is silent. But Jehoshaphat commends him, and says, "The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

It seems surprising that Jehoram did not resent this. But his haughty spirit was bowed down, and his conscience sided with the man of God.

It is a character of a citizen of Zion, how much more of a messenger of Divine truth, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned, while he honours them that fear the Lord. What a difference is there between the righteous and the wicked! And we should feel it, and show it in our conduct—But we must show it properly. And here some distinction is necessary. Elisha does not here speak as a subject; there is a respect due to a sovereign officially, whatever be his character; and therefore Paul retracted an exceptionable expression, remembering that it was said, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." But it was the prophet who here spoke in the name of the Most High God. Yet something of nature, it would seem, mingled with it; so that he was irritated and ruffled, and was rendered for the time unsusceptible of the prophetic inspiration. And what does he? "Bring me a min-

strel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

Minstrels were persons who played on the harp, and also sung, and sometimes with dancing. They are now unusual; but they were very common, formerly, in most countries. There were many of them in Israel.

The love of music is generally reckoned a sign of a good temper, and the use of it may help a bad one. The indulgence of it may be carried to excess, and be abused; but upon the whole, it is one of the most innocent, as well as agreeable employments. It has often been called in to inflame unhallowed mirth; but the Moravians, and Luther, and Calvin, and a thousand more, have proved that it is not only consistent with devotion, but aidful of it. It is founded in human nature. God has constructed us alive to it. Pythagoras used it always before he retired to bed. Plato recommends the use of it in the laws of his republic. David, by his harp, often chased away the evil spirit from Saul. It was much practised by the students in the schools of the prophets: hence Samuel said to Saul, at a certain place, "Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: and the Spirit of the Lord will come upon hee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." And here we find Elisha called in a devout Levite, to play and sing before him, to calm and raise his spirits, to receive the message of the Almighty.

Who thinks sufficiently of the dependence of spirit on matter? Does not every thing religious first address itself to the senses?

But let us derive an example from Elisha. Let us serve God without distraction. Let us lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. Let us cherish in religious exercises serenity, and love, and gentleness of mind, and feeling—

> "The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
> Flies from the realms of noise and strife;
> Why should we vex and grieve his love,
> Who seals our souls to heavenly life?"

DECEMBER 16.

"*Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched-out arm, and* THERE IS NOTHING TOO HARD FOR THEE."—Jer. xxxii. 17.

Much of true godliness consists in our holding communion with God not only in his relations, but in what we call his attributes or the perfections of his nature. We should especially do this, as our circumstances and experience render the exertion of any one of them in particular peculiarly needful and reasonable. This might be exemplified with regard to our misery and his mercy, our guilt and his grace, our ignorance and his wisdom. But what is the practical use we should make of the truth before us? a truth which all will readily acknowledge in speculation? "Nothing is too hard for thee."

Why then surely we should flee from his wrath, and seek an interest in his favour. Who would not dread the displeasure of Omnipotence? Who knoweth the power of *his* anger? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. His wrath is al mighty. It can arm every creature against me, from an insect to an archangel. It can operate immediately upon my mind without the intervention of instruments. It can reach me, where no mortal foe can touch me, beyond death and the grave. Hence said the Saviour, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." But if he can be an almighty enemy, he can be an omnipotent friend. He can cause all creatures to be at peace with me; and make all things to work together for my good. If he loves me and provides for me, the providence, the love is attended with infinite means and resources: and eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

> "And can this mighty Lord
> Of glory condescend?
> And will he write his name,
> My Father and my Friend?"

He has rendered it more than possible. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" He waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon us. He has established a ministry of reconciliation. By his servants God himself beseeches you to be reconciled unto God!

If nothing is too hard for him, let me depend upon him for the renovation of my depraved nature. Indeed when I consider myself, and think of the work that is to be accomplished, that it is not a mere change of opinion, a reformation of manners, but a transformation by the renewing of the mind, I should see no medium between utter despondency and that hope which leads me to this rock which is higher than I. He is the God of all grace. He can enlighten this understanding, dark as it is. He can soften this heart, hard as it is. He can render my duty my privilege; my work my pleasure. He can put his Spirit within me, and cause me to walk in his statutes and judgments to do them. He can give me a sense of his pardoning love under the deepest sense of my unworthiness and desert, and purge my conscience

from dead works to serve the living God. He is also adequate to the continuance and carrying on of the good work after he has begun it. Through all my dangers he can preserve me to the end of my course, and make me more than a conqueror. Under every burden he can sustain me. In every duty his grace is sufficient for me—Nothing is too hard for him.

This should animate us to do good in hopeless cases. I call these cases hopeless in reference to ordinary means and mere human agency: but there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. He has a mighty arm, strong is his hand, and high is his right hand. Who brought Manasseh to himself after he had sinned away all the effects of a pious education, and had sunk to the lowest depths of vice? By whom were the Corinthian converts washed, justified, sanctified? Let ministers who look down upon hearers who have grown into impenitence under their labours; let fathers and mothers whose hearts are bleeding over children of disobedience; let all who are striving in their stations to save a soul from death, encourage themselves in the Lord their God, and remember that he is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Let the reflection also sustain and comfort us when useful and valuable instruments are called away. There is much idolatry in our hearts, of which we are not aware till the idols are laid hold of and removed—Then we groan and exclaim, "My wound is incurable:" "Mine eye shall no more see good." Yet when the stream is dried up, is the fountain exhausted? When the husband and the father are withdrawn, does not he still live who is the Father of the fatherless and the Husband of the widow? Many a dying saint, in the midst of weeping dependants, has felt, as a cordial to his heart, the Divine assurance, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me." We may apply this still more to the cause of God. Here he uses means, and we ought to esteem them, but we must not depend upon them, or suppose that any of them are *essential* to his work. The government of the Church is not suspended upon men, however wise and qualified, but upon the shoulder of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. With him is the residue of the Spirit. When Elijah was taken, Elisha was left, and endued with a double portion of his spirit. What should we have said had we lived when Paul, when Luther died? Had we seen the prisons filled, and the stake fed with pious victims, what would have been our fears for the reformation? But these prisons, these fires only extolled, and increased, and recommended it. The professors, the preachers suffered as evil-doers, even unto bonds, but the word of God was not bound. Yea, the things that happened unto them turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel.

Finally, If nothing is too hard for the Lord, let it establish our confidence in his word of prophecy and promise, whatever seems to oppose the accomplishment of it. We cannot absolutely depend upon the word of men, for they are changeable; and if they continue in the same mind, they may be unable to fulfil their engagements. But with God there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, neither can he be ever incapacitated to perform with his hand what he has spoken with his mouth. The largeness of God's promise in the wilderness was at first too much for the faith of even Moses himself. "And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?" But what said the answer of God? "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." It was otherwise with Abraham the father of the faithful. When God had made promise to Abraham, notwithstanding the improbability, and, naturally considered, impossibility of the fulfilment, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief: but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." So let it be with us, first as to all God has engaged to do for us personally—even to the resurrection of our bodies, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself: and secondly, as to all those declarations of a public nature, and which regard the conversion of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, and the filling of the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. These are not visionary representations —"The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" —and "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"—"NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR THE LORD."

DECEMBER 17.

"*And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*"—Acts ix. 23—25.

THOUGH this is related immediately after Paul's conversion, it did not happen till a very considerable time afterwards. The aim of Luke, the sacred historian, was not to give a full and continued series of events, but to record particular facts and circumstances as

he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore often passes over large intervals between without notice.

It was near Damascus the Saviour met with him, and into which he had been led after he arose from the earth: "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth." Here by Ananias he was restored to sight, and here he received meat, and was strengthened. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples, which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Yet we know from Paul's own declaration, in his Epistle to the Galatians, that instantly upon this he did not go up to Jerusalem, but went into Arabia, where, during three years, he was taught, not of man, nor by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is probable that, during this period, he more than once visited Damascus. However this may be, here we find him at the end of it; and encompassed with danger, for he was in deaths oft, and could truly say, I die daily. His peril arose from "the Jews, who took counsel to kill him." Instead of being convinced by such a supernatural and notorious event, and which would be attested by so many witnesses, they were only enraged the more: for they viewed him as an apostate from them; and they knew from his talents and zeal how likely he was to promote the cause of Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet such things as they were now doing against him he had himself formerly done to others. How often would he be reminded of his sin in his sufferings! This would tend to keep him humble and patient. "Ah! so I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it."

So malignant and determined were they, that "they watched the gates day and night to kill him." At first this looks not like an exertion of authority, but an assassination affair, in which a number of wretches waylaid him of their own accord. Yet the governor was apprized of their design, and was drawn over to their interest, and more than allowed them to keep the egresses: for the city was large, and the avenues many, requiring no few to keep them. The Apostle, in relating the transaction himself, says, "The *governor*, under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a *garrison, desirous to apprehend me.*"

We have seen his danger, let us observe his deliverance. He seemed a certain prey; but "their lying in wait was known of Saul; and the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." Here we remark two things. First, the escape was not miraculous. In this way the Lord has often delivered his servants, and in this way he is continually *able* to deliver them. But he never needlessly multiplied miracles. We cannot see how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, could have been saved out of the midst of the fiery furnace, or Daniel from the lions' den, without a miracle. A miracle also was called for to release Peter from prison, secured as he was, the night before his intended execution. But here the deliverance could be effected by human means; they were therefore properly employed, and Providence only rendered them successful. Secondly; we are not to sacrifice our lives if we can preserve them consistently with a good conscience. Our Lord told his disciples to beware of men; to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves; and if they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. He himself eluded apprehension till he knew his hour was come. In the first age of Christianity we see zeal, but not without knowledge. There was nothing like enthusiasm, fanaticism, or will-worship. It was enough for Christians to take up their cross when they found it in their way; they never went *out* of their way to *find* it, any more than to *escape* it. They only suffered according to the will of God. It was after the Gospel began to be misunderstood and debased that voluntary penalties were deemed meritorious; that a *rage* for martyrdom prevailed; and that men *gave* their bodies to be burnt.

DECEMBER 18.

"*And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.*"—Acts ix. 26—28.

We have just seen Paul at Damascus. We now see him entering Jerusalem. And observe to whom he wished to introduce himself when he arrived. Not to the high priest: he had done business enough with him before. Not to the Pharisees, though he had lived among the strictest of them. Not to the learned, though a man of letters himself,

and though he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who probably was still living in the city—But "he assayed to join himself to the disciples." They were despised and persecuted. He had himself once hated them, and endeavoured to exterminate them from the earth. But now the world is not worthy of them. He ranks them above princes and philosophers; in them is all his delight; and he deems it his highest honour to have fellowship with them. Have we the same mind in us! In the course of duty, unless we go out of the world, we must often mingle with others; but are these, in our voluntary associations, our companions? Do we take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you! Do we give ourselves, not only to the Lord, but to them, to walk in holy communion, and to co-operate in holy exertion! When we pass through a place as we travel, do we feel a sentiment that leads us to think, with a peculiar concern, "Are there any here who love and serve my Lord and Saviour?"

"But the disciples were all afraid of him;" and the reason is assigned; "they believed not that he was a disciple." They supposed that he only pretended to be so, but was really come among them as a spy or informer. They well knew what a bitter adversary he had been, and had not heard of him since the wolf had been turned into a lamb. If there seems something strange in this, let it be observed that Damascus was one hundred and fifty miles from Jerusalem; that the modes of modern communication were not then known; and that the war raging between Herod Antipas, and Aretas, must have interrupted the intercourse between the two capitals. Neither is it unlikely that the unbelieving Jews maliciously and artfully represented him as acting the part of a deceiver.

However this was, they seem to have known nothing of his conversion till "Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." How Barnabas was acquainted with all this while they were ignorant we are not informed. Had he seen Ananias, or some other credible and personal witness of these facts? One man, from various supposable circumstances, may know things, of which others, even of the same place, are uninformed. But from this time a most tender friendship was established between these two good men. And what Barnabas testified of Paul was so satisfactory to the Church, that he was fully admitted to their fellowship, "and was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

We may here see, First—That these disciples were careful whom they admitted among them. They were only such as they *believed to be disciples*. They did not desire, for the sake of largeness, a church filled with indiscriminate members; and they could not bear them that were evil. Secondly, It is possible to err on the side of caution. We may be too strict as well as too lax. It is easy to carry our suspicions too far, especially with regard to those against whom we have entertained any prejudice, or from whom we have received any injury or offence. The instances of deception we have met with may weaken our confidence, and cause the innocent to suffer for the guilty. Let us guard against this, and while we do not shut our eyes let us invite into our bosoms the charity that thinketh no evil. Thirdly, we may depend on testimony concerning character in the absence of personal knowledge. This indeed is not always infallible; but there are cases in which it ought to be admitted, and should be deemed sufficient not only for individuals, but churches to act upon, in receiving others to their countenance, and their communication. Fourthly, the introducing of a young convert to the fellowship of the saints is a good work, and should be encouraged. Some are backward, not from a want of inclination, for they often sigh, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" but they want confidence and help. How many are there in all our congregations of this character, who are kept back when they ought to come forward! Is there no Barnabas to take them by the hand, and to bring them forward? While the Church rises up and says, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord?"

DECEMBER 19.

"*But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?*"—2 Chron. vi. 18.

In looking over the annals of the Jews, we find much that ought to humble us—I say, to humble *us*, for they were fair specimens of our human nature, and

> "There in a glass *our* hearts may see,
> How fickle and how false *they* be."

But we sometimes meet with scenes which cannot fail of being delightful to pious minds: for while, in reviewing history, the merchant is led to notice the revivals of commerce, and the scholar those of learning and science, *they* are attracted to the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; they, like Barnabas, are glad when they see the grace of God.

Such a scene is here before us at the dedication of the temple. Perhaps nothing equals it in the Old Testament; and nothing surpasses it in the New, but the day of Pentecost. The author was doubtless the Holy Ghost, the source of all good in the children of men: and

it would be well for hearers and ministers to remember the Divine decision, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Yet God uses means, and could we see things as he does, we should always perceive, not only that the weakness of the means requires his strength, but that the suitableness of the means displays his wisdom. The instrument here employed was Solomon, whose rank, education, endowments, and zeal, gave him a peculiar influence.

Behold then all Israel assembled, and the young monarch, the wonder and admiration of the age and of the East, leading the devotion of the solemn day. For he did not appoint one of the priests or of the prophets to officiate, but he performed the service himself. "He stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands." It was well that he *could* thus pray himself. We are far from depreciating forms of prayer in all cases: they have their use, and even their excellency too. But it is impossible to frame a form of prayer to meet every new and pressing occurrence: yet it is very desirable to take advantage of present feelings; and some are happy enough to be equal to this. And should not good men, especially preachers, and also the heads of families, cultivate such a talent? Gifts are not grace: yet we are to consider others as well as ourselves, our usefulness as well as our salvation. Though there is a *more* excellent way, we are to "covet earnestly the best gifts." "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." It is well also that he was not only able, but *willing*. He was not ashamed publicly to avow his entire dependence upon God, and to seek his favour as the relish of every enjoyment, and his blessing as essential to every enterprise. He did not view it as a disparagement to his majesty, to be his own chaplain, and to bless his large family himself. And did he ever appear greater than on this occasion, and in this exercise? And could he have been more exemplary and useful?

An ordinary mind would have been struck with the vastness of the congregation, the magnitude of the building, and the munificence of the ornaments—But Solomon rose above all this, and was only astonished at the condescension of God in deigning to regard it: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth!"

His exclamation did not originate in any doubtfulness of the fact. He could not have questioned it. The tokens of the Divine presence were before him—"So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." Yes, he knew that he had said, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it;" and, "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." The assurance therefore reaches to us. We have succeeded to their means and privileges, enlarged as to spirituality and efficiency, though unaccompanied with their splendid ceremonies and sensible manifestations. In his word and ordinances, in the preaching of his ministers, and the assemblies of his people, he is to be found; and thousands know the truth of this from their own experience: they have heard his voice; they have seen his glory; they have felt his power, and have been convinced of his presence by his agency: for that his name is near, his wondrous works declare.

But the exclamation regards the marvellousness of the fact upon which it was founded. Several things excited this in Solomon, and the same should excite it in us. Such is the infinite dignity of the Supreme Being who is exalted above all blessing and praise, and who humbleth himself to behold the things that are done in heaven. Yet men are lower than the angels. They are of yesterday, and know nothing. Their foundation is in the dust. They are crushed before the moth. Surely *every* man at his *best* estate is *altogether* vanity. He is not only mean, but unworthy, guilty, polluted: a rebel, a traitor. Here is the wonder, that *such* beings should be regarded by him—"Lord, what is *man*, that thou art mindful of him, and the *son* of man that thou visitest him?"

Yet the truth of all this never impresses without the humility which religion inspires. Men are naturally proud and vain: and it is possible and easy to delude them into an opinion that they can have claims upon God himself. How many are there who think they deserve his favour, and are looking for heaven itself as the reward of their doings! But in the day of conviction the proud looks are brought low, and the Lord alone is exalted. The man then sees and feels that he deserves to be excluded from the Divine presence for ever, and acknowledges every attention shown him to be an instance of mercy and grace. Nor is his admiration of the goodness of God confined to the beginning of his religious course. As he advances, he is more and more affected with it. The most eminent saints have been always as the most humble, so the most filled with this adoring gratitude and praise.

But is there not another thing equally wonderful? God in very deed dwells with men on the earth. But will men verily dwell with God in heaven? It is his own promise. It is their highest expectation. They shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory—AND SO SHALL WE BE FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

DECEMBER 20.

"*Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*"—1 Kings xx. 11.

This was the wisest thing Ahab ever spoke; and yet the saying was not his own, but a common proverbial speech. The admonition it contains is applicable to any enterprise in which men engage. Accordingly we shall leave the war of Benhadad with this king of Israel, and think of a better warfare, the good fight of faith.

Under this image the Scriptures frequently hold forth the Christian life; and the experience of every partaker of Divine grace verifies and exemplifies the force of it. The conflict is no ordinary one, but the most trying in its nature, and the most serious in its results.

For this war harness is provided; for it would be madness to go into the combat unarmed. Words in time vary their meaning; some becoming more, and some less particular and definite in their use. When the Bible was translated, the term harness, which we now apply only to horse equipage, signified war furniture, or what we call armour. Much depends, in the contest before us, upon the kind of armour with which we are accoutred. That of the Christian is Divine; Divine in the appointment; Divine in the formation. It supplies every part—unless the back. Hence says the Apostle; "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

With regard to the actual carrying on of this warfare, there is a variety of condition in the soldiers. Some are deeply engaged in the midst of the fight. But two other parties are here mentioned. The one is entering the field, the other is marching out of it: the one is putting on his harness, the other is putting it off.

Now there is a great difference between these, and it requires a difference of feeling. Prayer more becomes the one, and praise the other. The ending justifies relaxation, and joy, and triumph; the beginning demands application, and caution. The laurel is to be worn, not by the candidate, but by the conqueror.

Look at the young soldier arming, and at the old warrior laying down his weapons, and you will soon see why the former should not glory like the latter. Let him that is putting off the harness exult—His privations, hardships, dangers are all past. His foes are vanquished. His labours are over. His character is formed. His fidelity is proved. His firmness has been displayed. While he had fightings without, he sometimes had fears within; but, true to his cause, he said, If I perish I perish. Whatever he suffered, he scorned to desert his post. Yet an honourable dismission seemed desirable; and now it is arrived: and with his scars of honour he is returning home to receive the prize, and to review and talk over the interesting scenes of all his campaigns.

But let him that is putting on his harness remember that he has *not* borne the burden and heat of the day—that his destitutions, and watchings, and perils are yet to come—that his snares are not yet escaped—that his foes are not yet subdued. Though he will finally overcome, the warfare is *to be* accomplished. What weeks and years of painful struggle may intervene! He may sleep, and be surprised. The enemy may thrust sore at him, and gain an advantage over him; and in consequence of the injury, he may go halting all his days.

We say therefore to those who are commencing the Divine life—We are far from wishing to dismay you—We rather say, Go, and the Lord be with you. But the Saviour himself tells you to sit down, and count the cost, and estimate your resources for the war. A new and untried course is often flattering; and inexperience genders presumption.

Peter fell by self-confidence. Joseph was preserved by conscientious alarm—And blessed is the man that feareth always. Not with that fear which implies cowardice, but with that which excludes carelessness; not with that fear which chills and freezes exertion, but with that which leads to a survey of difficulties and to preparation for the trial; not with that fear which diminishes hope, but with that which forbids boasting—"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

DECEMBER 21.

"*I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*"—1 Tim. ii. 8.

"I will," says the proverb, "is for the king." And this is for the King—the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the blessed and only potentate. Paul is inspired by him, and speaks in his name. And though, in many cases, for love's sake he only entreats and beseeches, here, to show his Divine authority, he commands—"I will." Prayer is the subject. We must not only take heed how we hear, but how we pray: some ask and have not, because they ask amiss. Here the enaction prescribes the manner which it is to be perform

ed. Prayer is to be offered up with four qualities or characters.

The First is, universality; I will that men pray "everywhere." In the sanctuary, the house, the closet, the field, the road. The expression demands constancy. If we are to pray everywhere, we must pray and not faint; and pray without ceasing. And this is expressly enjoined by him who knows the importance and benefit of prayer; and that we can *never* safely dispense with it. Had Peter prayed in the judgment hall, he would not have denied his master. But while it requires constancy as to performance, it excludes partiality as to situation, and opposes superstitious restraints. This intimation was necessary. The world was then full of people who made the efficacy of prayer to depend upon local claims. Heathens always attached the presence of their gods to particular places, consecrated to their service; and we know what long and painful journeys some now take to pay their devotions. Among the Jews God chose Jerusalem to put his name there, and required all the males three times a year to repair thither. Various purposes were to be answered by the appointment; but the Lord had said by Moses, "In *all* places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And by Isaiah he said, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." And as the Christian dispensation was drawing nearer, "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." Think of this, ye bigots, who imagine that God is only to be found in your particular inclosure. When will you believe, that "neither in this mountain," nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father: "but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship he Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."

The Second is, purity—"with holy hands." "If I regard iniquity in mine heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." Solomon also says, "He that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, even his prayer also shall be an abomination." And so consonant is this to common reflection, that the blind man could say, "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth." But some distinction here is necessary. The reference cannot be to perfect purity. If none were to pray but those who are completely holy, no one could approach God: for in many things we offend all; and there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not. Yet what is the experience of every true suppliant? "Who can understand his errors! Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "What I see not teach thou me." "See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." And this must be the case. The man who lives in any loved or known sin, is only a hypocrite in devotion. He cannot be sincere in his addresses to God: he therefore insults him only by pretence. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." Of this there was a type in the ritual of the Jews; they were always to wash their hands in water before they engaged in the service of God. To this the Psalmist alluded, when he says, "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thy altar, O Lord." And that prayer is not an atonement for a sinful life, or a substitute for a moral one, hear the language of God to the Jews in the days of Isaiah. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." Yet some not only pray and sin too, but make the one a cloak for the other. The Pharisees devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers. But in many cases these things do not long remain in company: in general, the common maxim is verified, "Sinning will make a man leave off praying, or praying will make a man leave off sinning." And their separation is better than their union. It is better not to call upon a benefactor, than to go and spit in his face, or wound him, in his own dwelling. The entire neglect of some duties would produce less injurious effects on the conscience of the man himself, and on the minds of others, than the combination of them with wicked practice. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." "I would thou wert either cold or hot."

The Third is, kindness. This is expressed by the exclusion of its opposite "without wrath." This will take in those who may be free from vice and immorality, and yet have tempers by no means like the mind of Christ, who not only rail, but pray at others; who bring their rancorous spirit into the worship of God, and would consecrate their envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, upon the altar of devotion. But that altar does not sanctify every gift. "If thou bring thy gift

to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Though Elisha was animated by religious zeal, yet as there was some passionateness of his own mixed with it, when he said to Jehoram, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee;" the spirit of prophecy could not descend upon him, till he had called for a minstrel to compose and soften him. What can we do without the help of the Holy Spirit? But that Spirit is a spirit of love, and is held forth by the emblem of a dove. Therefore says our Apostle, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

The Fourth is, confidence. This is also negatively expressed: without "doubting." This requires us to pray in faith. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." "Let us draw near, in full assurance of faith." This is very distinguishable from a personal persuasion of our actual interest; but it is an encouragement against despair. We are to believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; that we are as welcome as we are unworthy; that he waits to be gracious, and never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. It also takes in a belief of the lawfulness of what we implore. I could not pray in faith, if I prayed for assistance and success in any enterprise which his word forbids; or in asking to be saved without being sanctified: for "this is the will of God, even our sanctification." "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

We talk of being humbled for our sins—What think we of our duties? Can we reflect even upon our holy things, even upon our prayers themselves, and not cry, "Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

DECEMBER 22.

"*And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha*"—2 Kings vi. 15—17.

The king of Syria had resolved to punish Elisha, because as a prophet he divulged to the king of Israel all his warlike plans and designs, and thereby prevented the accomplishment of them. How sin infatuates!—otherwise a moment's reflection might have convinced him that the same God who had given Elisha supernatural knowledge could afford him supernatural protection. Yet finding upon inquiry that the prophet was now in Dothan, "he sent thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about."

Elisha's servant first discovers the danger. But who was this servant? We have no reason to believe that it was now Gehazi, whose avarice, fraud, and lying, his master had lately so awfully punished: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Even exclusive of his distemper, Elisha would not have had such a servant any longer about him; but have said with David before him, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Of the name of his new servant we are not informed, but it is here said, he "rose up early in the morning." New servants often behave best at first, especially in the article of early rising. Perhaps however it was a continued thing with him. This will be the case with a wise and good servant. By means of this he will do his work with ease and order. What confusion and hurry are often produced by beginning the concerns of the day an hour or two later, for the precious privilege of a little more insensibility!

What happened? When the servant had gone forth and saw the horses and chariots, he ran back breathless, and exclaimed, "Alas, my master! what shall we do? We are in the hands of our enemies, and there is no way of escape."

Yet if the servant be terrified, the master is calm, and fears no evil. But a godly man wishes others to be satisfied as well as himself; and he is no better than a brute, and wholly unworthy of his service, who feels no concern for the accommodation and comfort of his servant. To tranquillize him therefore, Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." This only filled him with astonishment, for he

saw no defenders of any kind near him. But "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." What a number of reflections here offer themselves to our minds!

What were these horses and chariots of fire? The angels of God. "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." These were the convoy of Elijah. These were the body-guard of Elisha. When Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him; and when he saw them he said, "This is God's host." "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

We behold here an instance of the dominion and agency of God, in the opening of this man's eyes. He can suspend the use of any of our powers, or he can increase the use of them. He that endued us with the five inlets of perception, called the senses, could, as far as we know to the contrary, have given us fifty, as distinguishable from each other in their operations and objects as hearing and seeing. And who can tell, as Baxter (not the Divine) intimates, but that there is a faculty in the human system as adapted to an intercourse with the invisible world as our known senses are suited to the material existences around us, but which power is dormant unless when for some important end it is called into exercise? We are very imperfectly acquainted with the mechanism of our physical constitution, and especially with the boundaries and contents of body and mind; for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. One conclusion is obvious—That it is irrational to deny the *reality* of every thing our present senses do not recognize. This valley was filled in the same way *before* the man could see it: his sight did not bring thither the celestial array, but only discerned it. Every sound, even thunder itself, is a nonentity to the deaf; fragrance has no existence as to the perception of those who are incapable of smelling; the colours of the rainbow might be denied by the blind: because they cannot hear or feel them. It has therefore been fairly argued from analogy that there may be numberless objects, real and near us too, but which, only for want of a suitable medium, we do not apprehend. As for those who believe the Scriptures, as well as the power of God, *they* must acknowledge that there is another world, and that there are agents whose influence is seldom or ever *perceived* by us, who yet have alliances with us, and are concerned in our affairs. May the Father of our Spirits prepare us for a world of spirits!

We also here see the disadvantage of ignorance. In darkness we easily mistake every thing, and are sure to magnify whatever we suspect to be injurious. What therefore we deem some sprite or monster, upon the increase of light subsides into a stone, or root of a tree, or a harmless animal. This man's perturbation arose from his ignorance; as soon as he knew the *truth* of things, as soon as he saw things as they *really were*, he was tranquillized—And is not this the way to tranquillize Christians? Do not their alarms originate in their want of clearer views in religion? "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; because thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." They that "know" whom they have believed will be "persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him against that day."

And how safe are the Lord's people even in the midst of danger! He is a wall of fire round about them. He is the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency, and their enemies shall be found liars unto them. Let us ascertain that we belong to him; and realizing our privilege, exclaim, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident?" If God be for us, who can be against us?" THEY THAT BE WITH US ARE MORE THAN THEY THAT BE WITH THEM.

DECEMBER 23.

"*Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.*"—Jer. xxx. 21.

THIS is spoken, if not immediately, yet ultimately and supremely, of him to whom gave all the prophets witness.

Observe his work—It was to "approach" unto God. This he did as a man. How often do we read of his praying, which, with him, was never any thing less than a drawing near to God! But he is here spoken of as the mediator, and in the character of the High Priest of our profession. This was precisely the priest's business of old; it was to approach God mediatorially. Hence says God, "I will be sanctified in all that come nigh me." So when the persons of the priests are spoken of, it is said to Aaron, "Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach." I dwell not here on the grounds of this exclusion, some of which were physical, some moral, some typical; but remark their work, to "offer," to "approach." And how? If the high priest had gone into the holy of holies, where God resided between the cherubim, without a sacrifice, he would have rushed upon a drawn sword. Therefore he first slew the victim, and then took the blood in a

bason, and went in and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burnt incense; upon which he came forth and blessed the people. Thus Jesus entered into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us; not without blood; and not with the blood of bulls, and of goats, but with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. There he entered, after making reconciliation for the sins of the people, to intercede for us, on the foundation of his atonement, and from thence to command the blessing, even life for evermore, on the Israel of God. But there was this difference between the type and the reality. The high priest of old offered for his own sins, as well as for those of the congregation. But Jesus had no personal guilt. He was harmless, holy, undefiled; and therefore he only bore *our* iniquity. The high priest offered oftentimes the same sacrifices, because they could not make the comers thereunto perfect: but Jesus, by the one offering up of himself, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

For the accomplishment of this work, he "engaged his heart." Here we see willingness. His undertaking would not have been accepted, unless it had been voluntary. But he was not constrained; he said, Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. The engaging of his heart expresses the strength of his affection and the firmness of his determination. The latter of these sprang from the former, and served to display it. Consider what he had to endure for thirty-three years as a man of sorrows; what he had to suffer in delivering us from the wrath to come, being made a curse for us. Yet though he knew all, he turned not away his back: yea, as his tremendous agony drew near, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The reason was, that perfect love casteth out fear. Love produces courage, even in the fearful bird and the timid sheep. They will attack their foe to defend their young. But how the mother ventures and hangs regardless of danger over the infected body of her child! Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it. But no love will bear a comparison with his—"the love of Christ passeth knowledge."

And is he not worthy of attention? "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord"—Who indeed! "He is a wonder to all, both below and above." Many were astonished at him. Many treated him with scorn. He was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Numbers do not feel their need of him, though he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is still despised and rejected of men. But he was seen of angels, and all the angels of God worship him. They find nothing in the annals of eternity and in the records of the universe that will bear a comparison with his sufferings and glory. Therefore they desire to look into these things: and every fresh gaze excites them to exclaim with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And to them that believe he is precious. They inquire with joy and praise, "Who is this?" And they can return an answer to themselves—He is fairer than the children of men. He is the chief of ten thousand. He is altogether lovely. He is the consolation of Israel. He is the friend of sinners. He is a benefactor whose heart is made of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love. He is the King of glory. He is Lord of all. But who can declare his generation? No one knoweth the Son but the Father—He views him with infinite complacency. "Behold," says he, "my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "He hath put all things under his feet."

The question may be asked subordinately with regard to the Christian as well as with regard to Christ. There is a connexion and a resemblance between them; and they also are for signs and for wonders. They do not indeed approach God in a way of atonement. The work is done. The propitiation has been made, and we have only to plead it: the righteousness has been brought in, and we have only to submit to it. *He* opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and they have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. And this is their duty, their privilege, their character—they draw near to God; and they value ordinances as the means of communion with him.

For each of them has engaged his heart to do this. And it is this that yields him pleasure in the exercise, and carries him through all difficulties and discouragements —"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my *heart* answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

But "who is this that has engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord." A creature once far off, but now made nigh by the blood of Christ: once regardless of the things that belonged to his peace, now seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The subject of an internal warfare; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The bearer of many afflictions. The scorn of the world. The most excellent and important creature

upon earth. The heir of glory. The dignitary of eternity. "What! know ye not that the saints shall judge angels?"

DECEMBER 24.

"*And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.*" Ephes. v. 2.

The admonition supposes a relative character. Various are the beings towards whom our love is to be exercised. God takes care for oxen, and hears the young ravens that cry: and a merciful man regardeth the life of his beast, and feels a tenderness even towards all the orders of creatures below his own nature. But we are expressly required to love our neighbour; and according to our Saviour's own explanation in the parable, every one *is* our neighbour who needs our aid, and is placed within the reach of our kindness. We are therefore to love our enemies; not indeed with a love of esteem and complacency, which would be impossible, but with a love of benevolence and beneficence; blessing them that curse us, doing good to them that hate us, and praying for them that despitefully use and persecute us. We are also to love sinners, not their sins, but their souls, having compassion, and endeavouring to save, pulling them out of the fire. None indeed have such claims upon our pity and compassion as those who are ready to perish for ever; destruction and misery are in their paths. But while, as we have opportunity, we do good unto all men, we are especially to remember them that are of the household of faith. These are related to us by grace: these are one with us by spiritual and everlasting unions. These have peculiar titles to our affection—These we are to love out of a pure heart fervently: to love as brethren.

For how is this affection to be exercised? We are to "walk in it." The term intends not only activeness and progression, but influence and prevalence. When we say a man is in liquor, or in a passion, we mean to say that it has the possession and the command of him. We read of "walking in pride;" and we understand by it a man's feeling and behaving vainly and haughtily on all occasions, and in all circumstances. The first Christians "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost:" the fear and the comfort distinguished, governed, and absorbed them. Walking in love, therefore, intimates the importance of this disposition, and that we should not be satisfied with an ordinary measure of it. We are not to have love in us, but to be in love; to walk in love. It is to be our element, our actuating principle. It is only in proportion as this prevails that our religion can prosper. This is the fulfilling of the law. This is the end of the gospel commandment. It is the bond of perfectness—Therefore "let all your things be done with charity."

And how is it enforced? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Does the Apostle mean to make the love of Christ our model? or our motive? or both? Unquestionably both.

He means to make it our model, and to say that we are to love others in the same way he loved us. Our love cannot indeed equal his; but it may, it must resemble it; not indeed in all its acts and qualities, but in its source and nature. He loved us really, and we must love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. He loved us expensively; so that when rich, for our sakes he became poor, made himself of no reputation, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And are we to shun self-denial? And to make no sacrifices? "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." His love is constant and unchangeable; and we are to continue in his love, and never to grow weary in well-doing.

He means also to make it our motive, and to say, that as he has loved us we are to walk in love, in consequence of this, and because of this. The Apostle does not argue from fear, or mercenariness, or even the allowed hope of reward: but urges a consideration the most pure and ingenuous; and at the same time the most powerful. A motive strong as death, and which many waters could not quench. A motive whose efficiency he had himself experienced, and which had served to animate him in every duty, and enabled him to take pleasure in every suffering for Christ's sake—"For the love of Christ," says he, "constraineth us." He therefore could not enforce even a relative duty without a reference to a motive so tender and efficient: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it—"

> —"O bleeding Calvary!
> The true morality is love of thee."

And here we may see that the difference between a mere moral preacher and an evangelical preacher is, not that the moral preacher enforces good works, and the evangelical preacher does not; for the latter enforces them as much as the former. But it lies here—Both admonish and exhort; but the one waters dead plants, and the other living ones. The one makes the tree good, that the fruit may be good—while the other is seeking to gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles. The doctrines and the duties; the holiness and the grace of the Gospel, never are found separate.

DECEMBER 25.

'*But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*"—Micah v. 2.

Some persons derive honour from the place in which they were born; others confer celebrity upon it. How many places strove for the honour of Homer's birth! The late emperor of France, while besieging Mantua in Italy, exempted a small neighbouring village from all exactions, in honour of Virgil, whose birth-place it was supposed to be. Nothing can ennoble the Lord Jesus; but he dignifies every thing in connexion with him. Capernaum was an insignificant fishing town: yet, because he frequently resided and preached in it, it was exalted unto heaven. Beth-lehem was not remarkable for its buildings, or commerce, or the number of its inhabitants, or fame of any kind. Thus it was "little among the thousands of Judah." But it was aggrandized and immortalized by an event that fixed upon it the eye of inspiration, that drew towards it in the fullness of time a multitude of the heavenly host, and has rendered it dear and memorable to the Church for ever—the Nativity of the Messiah. "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Let this teach us not to call any thing common or unclean. Let us guard against those prejudices which are derived from worldly grandeur and glory. Jesus was not born in Rome, or in Jerusalem; but, in accordance with all the circumstances of his abasement, in a small and obscure village. And Joseph the saviour of Egypt was taken from prison; and Moses the king in Jeshurun from the ark of bulrushes; and David the great from the sheepfold. The world was evangelized by fishermen from the lake of Galilee. And Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." "Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

When Herod inquired of the chief priests and scribes where Christ should be born, they answered, In Bethlehem of Judea. When it was rumoured that he came out of Galilee, his enemies immediately said, "Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Beth-lehem, where David was." Thus the place of his birth was not only fixed, but fully known. Yet what could be so unlikely as the accomplishment of the prophecy which had raised this expectation? When Mary conceived, there was not the least probability of her being delivered at Beth-lehem—She was in Galilee, living at Nazareth. But Augustus issues a decree that all the world should be taxed. This required not only that a certain tribute should be paid, but that every man should go to his own city to be enrolled. Hence Joseph went up to Beth-lehem, and Mary his espoused wife accompanied him, being great with child. "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." There is always something wonderful in the works of God. We frequently prescribe a course for him, or we expect him to move in a particular direction: but he brings the blind by a way that they know not; and leads them in paths which they have not known. While we think he is doing nothing, and his promise seems to fail for evermore, his arrangements are formed, his agents are in motion, his designs are fulfilled, and we exclaim, "What hath God wrought! Let us trust and not teach him; and whenever he has spoken, believe, that if heaven and earth should pass away, his word will not fail."

"Shall he come forth unto me!"—as if he called him and he came. And he did call him: and he said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He had to act *with* God, and *for* him; to show forth his righteousness, to vindicate his law, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people, to glorify him on the earth, and to finish the work which he gave him to do. Therefore God calls him "my shepherd." Therefore he says, "I have laid help on one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

"Who shall be ruler in Israel." He came into the world to save sinners; but he is a prince as well as a Saviour. His outward circumstances at his birth, and all through life, seemed to bespeak any thing rather than royal dominion. Yet in this estate he was previously announced: "Behold, my king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; *lowly*, and riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." And the elements, and all creatures, were at his sovereign control. The winds and the waves, diseases, death, and devils obeyed him. He called Zaccheus, and he came down and received him joyfully. He said to the sons of Zebedee, as they were fishing, and to Matthew as he was sitting at the receipt of custom, Follow me; and they arose, and, forsaking all, followed him. "Art thou a king, then!" said Pilate. He answered, "I am a king. But my kingdom is not of this world—Then would my servants fight—But now my kingdom is not from hence." The government of all

things is indeed upon his shoulder, and he rules in the midst of his enemies, and makes their wrath to praise him. But his people only are in a proper sense his subjects. They are made willing in the day of his power, and from knowledge and attachment resign themselves to his empire; and he not only reigns over them, but in them, by "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Surely these words imply and express an existence before his incarnation, and an eternal existence too. The Evangelist bears the same testimony to this interesting truth: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Apostle also says, "He is"—not he *was;* "he *is* before all things, and by him all things exist." It was "the Spirit of Christ" that spake in the prophets. It was Christ the Israelites tempted. It was the reproach of Christ that Moses prized. He appeared in a human form to Joshua and to the patriarchs. But "of old" is not "from everlasting." Who can tell what he did before time had begun to roll? We know that he had a glory with the Father before the world was. We know

> "His busy thoughts, at first,
> On their salvation ran;
> Ere sin was formed, or Adam's dust,
> Was fashion'd to a man."

One remark results from all this. We see what a wonderful character the Redeemer is, and how constantly the sacred writers combine together his greatness and his abasement. Thus here, while we see him born in Bethlehem, we behold him the king of glory, whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting. It is his greatness that displays his goodness. He loved us, and gave himself for us. He is a man of sorrows, but it was because the children were partakers of flesh and blood that he likewise took part of the same. *He* made himself of no reputation, and *became* obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Ah! Christians, what you have witnessed to-day will not detract from his glory in your regards. You "know the principle of all this humiliation." You know "THE GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ; how, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

DECEMBER 26.

"*The consolation of Israel.*"—Luke ii. 25.

LET us justify this character of the Messiah.

And here to what shall we appeal? To the language of prophecy? Whenever the prophets would comfort the Jews, they always led them to his coming and his kingdom. Witness Isaiah: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Witness Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Witness Malachi: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

Or shall we appeal to the experience of Old Testament saints? Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Moses esteemed his reproach greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Job's solace was, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." David, at the thought of describing him, said, "My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." And what said the angel of the Lord to the shepherds? "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

That he considered himself as the owner of this title, and as deserving it, is undeniable, from the gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "In me ye shall have peace." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come." "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

And how was he regarded in the first and purest age of the Church? "Whom having," says Peter, "not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye

rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And, says Paul, "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." He makes it one part of the character of the circumcision that they "rejoice in Christ Jesus." Yea, he swears upon the certainty of it; "I protest by *your* rejoicing which *I* have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." It would be easy to show from additional passages how the first Christians, taught by inspired teachers, repaired always and only to him for consolation in whatever circumstances they were found.

And need we wonder at this? What is he? How does the word of truth represent him? Is he not a hiding-place from the storm? The shadow of a great rock in a weary land? A river of waters in a dry place? The bread of life? The robe of righteousness? A light in darkness?

These representations are indeed very figurative, but they are derived from reality. And he for whom Simeon waited, more than embodies them all—"The consolation of Israel." Let me glance at four things in particular, concerning which, if he be not our hope, we are hopeless.

What can I do with my guilt without him? I cannot deny that I am a sinner; but the soul that sinneth it shall die. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. And what does this curse include? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can relieve and comfort me here but he who said, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? Who bare our sin in his own body on the tree, and made peace by the blood of his cross?

What can I do with my depravity without him? For I am not only guilty—my understanding is darkened, my will is rebellious, my affections are earthly and sensual—I feel my weakness—yea, my very heart is alienated from the life of God. And to whom can I apply but to him who is wisdom and sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption? He says, My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death.

What can I do without him in trouble? But this man is the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land. This brother is born for adversity.

What can I do without him in death? But he can support and comfort me when every other support and comfort *must* fail. Ah! says Simeon, "*Now* lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

> "Jesus, the vision of thy face
> Hath overpowering charms;
> Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
> If Christ be in my arms."

DECEMBER 27

"*The consolation of Israel.*"—Luke ii. 25.

Let us improve this character of the Messiah. If he be the consolation of Israel—

It reminds us of the state of those who, as the Apostle says, "are without Christ." They are lying in wickedness; the victims of guilt and depravity; abandoned to the miseries of life; and all their life-time subject to bondage through fear of death. They feel their disease in many of its effects, though not in all: but there is no balm of Gilead, no physician *there*. They have recourse to the most painful pilgrimages, and privations, and tortures, to obtain ease and hope, but amidst doubt and suspicion lies are their refuge; the way of peace have they not known; destruction and misery are in their paths—And are they bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh! And do we not pity them! Do we not pray for them? And while we pray that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations, do we not evince by our exertions and sacrifices, that our prayers are not hypocrisy or formality? *For we have the communication of this knowledge in our power.*

The character invites sinners to come to him. While you neglect him you are only observing lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercy. Nothing can supply the place of the consolation of Israel. Suppose you prosper in the world, the abundance you possess cannot ease the conscience, or fill the wishes of the mind. You grasp at substance, but seize only vanity. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. But what will you do in the day of adversity? And how soon may this come upon you! How mortal are your connexions! What is your health? What is your life? You are now dreaming, but how will it be with you when you wake?

> "O ye gay dreamers of gay dreams,
> How will you weather an eternal night,
> Where such expedients fail?"

What a mercy that you can yet hear the sound of consolation! Here is a Comforter at hand, able, willing to succour you. Seek him, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The character hails those who have found him. They were indeed strangers to all true comfort till they acquainted themselves with him. But he that hath the Son hath life. They are now the happiest beings in the world. They are justified from wrath through him. In his righteousness they are exalted. They rejoice in his salvation; and can leave all their cares in his hand. If the storm rages without, "their minds have heaven and peace within." They know that he will never leave them nor forsake them; that he has provided for every state in which they can be found; that he is now making all things work to-

gether for their good; and will soon wipe all tears from their eyes.

But how does the title reproach those who backslide from him? "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee?" Did he not remember thee when there was none to pity? Did he not deliver thee when there was none to help? Did he not find thee in the road to hell, and turn thy feet into the path of life? Did he not bring thee health and cure after trying physicians of no value? It was a touching expostulation he addressed to the twelve, when many turned back and walked no more with him; "Will ye also go away?" And it was a fine reply; "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We should only be losers by any exchange we could make.

What can be a substitute for him? The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways. If a fear of reproach or persecution turns you astray from Christ, you may feel such reflection and terror of conscience as may make you long for him even in a prison, or at the stake. If the love of gain tempts you, you may get the worldly advantage you seek after, but you will lose the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation.

Whatever you lean upon instead of trusting in him will fail you, and pierce you through with many sorrows. Yes, we must learn by what we suffer, as well as by what we enjoy, that he is THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL. "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

DECEMBER 28.

"*In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God.*"—Heb. ii. 17.

THERE is indeed one exception. It regards the purity of his nature. This was indispensable, and therefore the Scripture abundantly confirms it, telling us that he was "the Holy One of God," that "he did no sin;" that "in him was no sin." And our Apostle is not forgetful of it in the connexion before us: "he was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin*."

But this exception being made, the conformity between him and his brethren is universal and complete; if there be any difference, it is in their favour. Are they partakers "of flesh and blood?" "He himself likewise also took part of the same." "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Are they poor? He had not where to lay his head. Are they reviled? "Reproach," says he, "hath broken my heart." Does the adversary assail them? He urged him to the vilest crimes. Do they complain of successless exertion? He said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught." Have they irreligious connexions? "Neither did his own brethren also believe on him." Are their souls vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly? How must he have been grieved, with all his spiritual susceptibilities, when he saw the transgressors! Have they before them the trying hour of death? He knows what it is to die; and in the days of his flesh, with strong cryings and tears, said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"—"In all things he was made like unto his brethren."

And observe the expediency of the dispensation. "It behoved him." What, could not they be admitted to favour without his humiliation and suffering? Was it only proper for them to obtain glory by his shame, riches by his penury, healing by his strokes, and life by his dying? Yes, "it behoved him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Is then necessity laid upon him? Does sovereignty itself submit to a law? Do unbounded excellency and goodness condescend to be circumscribed and regulated? And can we who are not our own complain if we are under restraints? Are we to dispense with those rules and decencies which have been established for the safety and welfare of society? Order is essential to happiness. It is allied to all greatness. It is "heaven's first law." God himself is the example of it: he acts by rule. He does not tell us what he could do, but what it "became" and "behoved" him to do; and that he does it not because he would, but because it seemed good in his sight. Let us not deny, dispute, or doubt the expedience of this economy, because we are unable to perceive all the reasons upon which it is founded. Let us remember how limited our understanding is with regard to every subject, and how limited therefore it must be when it would explore the proceedings of an infinite Being, and where

too, that Being is engaged in his highest operations. We cannot conclude that a course is right because a man adopts it; yea, the very reverse is oftener to be feared. But we may always safely infer the rectitude of God's conduct from the perfection of his nature. But if he has been pleased to inform us expressly that whatever difficulties, owing to our ignorance, may now attach to it, the plan was, he himself being judge, proper and becoming in him;—surely we ought to honour him with our confidence, and be willing to walk by faith—especially too, when he engages to explain his dealings after our state of trial and discipline is ended, and—when we can by humble attention and prayer discern enough to convince us that he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, and to induce us from what we see to exclaim with regard to what we do not see, "O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God"—"His work is perfect."

Let us therefore remark the aim and design of this peculiar and expensive constitution. "That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." "Things pertaining to God" mean the concerns of his mediation; the things in which he was to act with God for us, and with us for God. Without having our nature he could not have exercised the priesthood at all, for he would have had nothing to offer, and a priest must of necessity have somewhat to offer. But in this nature, and by this abasement and sufferings, he was

"A merciful" High Priest. He *appeared* merciful. He knew that nothing could be done unless he gained for himself our confidence, and he knew how hard it was with our consciousness and fears to gain it. He therefore said, I will convince them of my compassion, and show them that I prefer their salvation to my own comfort and life. I will go and dwell among them: I will call them to behold me in the manger, in the garden, and on the cross—Will not this suffice? He was *made* merciful. He was rendered capable of the sympathy which can only flow from experience. He only that has been a stranger knows the heart of a stranger. The most humane are those who have been trained to feeling in the school of affliction. The fact is applied to him: "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." And it is thus we are encouraged to apply to him in the time of need: for though he be passed into the heavens, we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

He was a "faithful" High Priest. Faithful to what? To the prophecies, promises, types, going before? He said, "Lo! I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." Faithful to his own engagements? He turned not away his back; but as the awful scene approached he said, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The main thing is, that he was faithful to the Divine interests, for as the former article refers to us, so this principally refers to God. He was the mediator between God and man, and had to maintain his honour, as well as to secure our deliverance. Kindness itself may be mis-exercised; absolute mercy may not only be folly and weakness, but injustice, injury, cruelty. Magistrates are to be terrors to evil-doers, as well as a praise to them that do well. The judge is to be not only merciful, but faithful; and while he feels for the criminal, he *must* maintain the law, though he may pass the sentence with tenderness in his heart, and tears in his eyes. Sinners were not to be saved as if they had not been guilty, but in a way that should remind them that their lives were given back to them after they had been forfeited; that they had incurred the penalty of the law; that this penalty was founded in equity, and could not be dispensed with; and therefore that our Substitute bore it in his own body on the tree, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Thus sin is condemned in the flesh while it is forgiven, and the law is magnified and made honourable while the offender escapes. Thus mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, and the claims of rectitude as well as clemency are provided for, while, as the Apostle adds, "he makes reconciliation for the sins of the people."

DECEMBER 29.

"*And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.*"—Gen. xlvii. 7.

It was an affecting hour when Jacob, after supposing for so many years that his son was dead, and devoured by wild beasts, received information that he was alive, and governor over all the land of Egypt. At first his heart fainted, and he believed it not. But when he had not only heard the words which Joseph had spoken, but saw the wagons that he had sent to fetch him down, his spirit revived in him, and he said, "It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."—He soon set off. But the journey was formidable to him. The old dislike changes, and cleave to places to which they have been accustomed. He therefore travelled anxiously, and when he came to Beersheba he felt alarmed. But he had recourse to his old and tried relief, prayer: "and God spake to him in the visions of the night, and said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into

Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Three interesting presentations followed the execution of this journey.

The presentation of Joseph to Jacob. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." Then loosening from the lengthened embrace which all attempt to enlarge upon would spoil; "he said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

The presentation of his brethren to Pharaoh. "And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our father. They said, moreover, unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

The presentation of Jacob to Pharaoh. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh"—Who can

Reflect upon this event, and not admire the wonder-working Providence of God in bringing it to pass? All this was foreseen and foreappointed; but how many agencies were set in motion to produce the result, while the agents themselves were unconscious of the bearing of their respective parts, and were all acting separately from each other, yet all working together—till at last all the discords issued in the finest harmony; and these were the strains to which it was attuned: "He hath done all things well." "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Art thou tempted to despondence? Do the clouds return after the rain? Seest thou no way of escape? Do means fail? Does the providence of God seem not only to forget but oppose the promise? See Joseph the slave, the prisoner, lately in irons, now prime minister of a powerful and learned nation, presenting his weather-beaten father, whose fears are now dispelled, and every hope and wish of his long-aching heart more than crowned! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At evening-tide, it shall be light.

What did the patriarch on this occasion? "And Jacob blessed Pharaoh."—It was an expression of salutation towards a stranger. Good men are not to be uncivil and rude, and pass this off as sincerity and faithfulness. They ought to be the most genteel people upon earth; for they ought to feel in disposition, the politeness—that is, the readiness to deny themselves, and please and oblige others, which the people of the world express ceremoniously, and often very falsely. The servant of the Lord is to be "gentle towards all men." And we are enjoined to be "courteous."—It was an act of homage towards a sovereign, whose subject he now was. We are all upon a level before God: but religious equality is not to be carried into our relative and civil concerns. The Scripture supports the distinctions of life, and calls upon us to "render to all their due; honour to whom honour, fear to whom fear."—It was an expression of gratitude towards a benefactor, who had promoted his son, and was now willing to receive all his relations, and provide for them in the most fertile region of his empire. The grace that makes us humble, makes us thankful. And while we acknowledge God as the source of all good, we must not overlook those who are the mediums of it.—It was an act of supplication on the behalf of a man who, however highly exalted, stood in need of the favour of God. The less is blessed of the greater. And Jacob was in this respect greater than Pharaoh—He was the servant of the Most High God—a prophet of the Lord—and who had obtained the name of Israel because, as a prince, he had power with God as well as with man, and could prevail. He therefore invokes the benediction of God upon him; upon his person, upon his family, upon his government, upon his empire—thus delicately and inoffensively leading him to think of the Supreme Being, and to feel his dependence upon him. What is a palace, without the blessing of God? His loving kindness is better than life.

DECEMBER 30.

"*And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?*"—Gen. xlvii. 8.

We may consider the question as an instance of condescension and kindness on the part of Pharaoh. There is something in majesty that overawes and overpowers those who have been brought up remote from it. Pharaoh was the greatest monarch of the age, and Jacob had been a plain man, dwelling in tents, and acquainted only with rustic life and manners; and he was now at a period too

late to acquire new modes of address. A true nobleman can disembarrass those that address him, and inspire them with decent confidence, without lowering the respect they entertain for him: and this is very much done by seizing something with which the inferior is familiar, and in which he feels more at home. Jacob probably dreaded this interview because of the conversation; the king therefore instantly begins upon his age. This would also be pleasing to Jacob. Old people love to talk of early scenes, and of things *they* saw and heard before others were born. Their years give them a kind of dignity and pre-eminence. Years have in all countries laid a foundation for respect—"Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man."

But let the preacher bring home this question, especially as we are so near the end of another year, to all who are here present. We would not have even females excluded. In this quarter indeed we should feel an impropriety in the question if an answer were to be returned aloud. The age of only one woman, even when she died, is mentioned in the Scripture—It were rude to pry where secrecy is so sacred. Years are at variance with personal attraction and impression; and many dislike to be reminded of the failure of their reign. But if by dress and hired tints they try to impose upon others, can they be ignorant themselves? Know they not the real lapse of their time and their influence? Let them therefore be concerned to establish an empire upon something more solid than corporeal charms.—Let them cultivate the mind; let them adorn the heart and life with the graces of the Holy Spirit; let them abound in good works; let them with Mary choose the good part that shall not be taken away from them—Thus they will descend even into the vale of age with honour, and be estimable even in the tomb.

Allow me then to ask each of you, "How old art thou?" It is a question which you *can* answer. There is a great difference between looking backward and looking forward. You know not what a day may bring forth. You cannot tell how long you have to live—But you know how long you have lived. It is a question you *ought* to answer. There is nothing of more importance than to know how you stand with regard to the progress of your time. Time is your most valuable possession. Every thing depends upon it; and once gone it can never be recalled. Inquire therefore how much of it *is* gone; and how much of it probably *remains*.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Few indeed reach this period. But this is the general limit. And beyond it no man has a right to look. Philip Henry therefore, when he had entered his seventieth year, always dated his letters, "The year of my dying." Yet have not some of you even passed this period? Are not others near it? And do not even fifty, forty, thirty years make an awful inroad upon the measure! Are you in early life? You think perhaps that you have many years before you, during which your eye will see good. But do you learn this from Scripture and observation? Do not both these tell you that childhood and youth are vanity? Are you aged? On what distance are you reckoning before you reach your journey's end? Miles? Furlongs? Feet? There is but a *step* between you and death. Are you old in sin? Your time is ending, and your work not even yet begun!

Here the question assumes a spiritual import. Christians are new creatures. They are born again. How old are we in grace? We have lived really no longer than we have lived to God, a life of faith, hope, holiness, and love. Where then are we in the Divine life? What are we in the family of God? Are we little children, or young men, or fathers in Christ?

Christian! how old art thou? "Old enough to be wiser and better. I blush to think how great my advantages have been, and how I have misimproved them. How long have I been in the best of all schools, and how little have I learned! Lord, clothe me with humility. Enable me to present thee a broken heart and a contrite spirit which thou wilt not despise."

> "What have I done for him that died
> To save my wretched soul?
> How have my follies multiplied,
> Fast as my minutes roll!"

What am I to do this evening?—

> "Lord, with this guilty heart of mine
> To thy dear cross I flee;
> And to thy grace my soul resign,
> To be renewed by thee."

Aged Christian! What says your answer to this question?—Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. A few more descending suns, and "thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw herself; for God shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy sojourning shall be ended."

DECEMBER 31.

"*And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.*"—Gen. xlvii. 9.

THERE is something very simple and affecting in this representation. It places life before us under the image of a pilgrimage. Such Jacob's life was *literally*. We find him perpetually changing his residence. He never occupied a mansion. What the Apostle says of Abraham, applies also to Isaac and Jacob. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise

as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." This fine passage shows us that Jacob was a pilgrim, not only or principally because of his outward condition, but his spiritual experience. He was allied to another and a nobler world by birth, by his possessions there, and by his advancement towards it.

Life indeed is a pilgrimage, even naturally considered. We never continue in one stay. We pass through successive periods of being; through days, and weeks, and years; through infancy, youth, manhood, and old age; and then we go down to the grave. In this sense none are residents here; all are travellers, hastening the way of all the earth.

But the figure is more strikingly true, if taken in a religious sense. The progression we have just mentioned is not the choice or wish of the multitude: and we can hardly call a man a pilgrim who is driven by force, and carried along as a prisoner or a captive; he only deserves the name who has an object in view, and which he is anxious to attain, and towards which he is voluntarily moving. Others are "men of the world,"

> "Their hope and portion lies below,
> 'Tis all the happiness they know."

But the Christian has his "conversation in heaven," and can say,

> "What others value I resign,
> Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine:
> I shall behold thy blissful face,
> And stand complete in righteousness."

But Jacob attaches to his pilgrimage two properties. First, brevity—"Few have the days of the years of my life been." Yet he had lived one hundred and thirty years. But Isaac had lived one hundred and eighty; and Abraham one hundred and seventy-five, and Terah two hundred and five. And what were these ages compared with those before the Flood? And what were those compared with eternity? Yet this properly applies much stronger to our life than to the life of Jacob. There is not a man now living who expects to reach one hundred and thirty. The sacred writers have employed every image importing shortness of duration to characterize the hastiness of our continuance here. A flood. A tale. A vapour. A weaver's shuttle. An eagle pouncing on his prey. What is it then when compared with the grand purposes of life—The salvation of the soul! The glorifying of God! The serving of our generation! Surely we have not a moment to lose! And as in a letter, if the paper is small, and we have much to write, we write closer, so let us learn to economize and improve the remaining moments of life.

The second is, misery. Not only "few," but "evil," says he, "have the days of the years of my life been." His history verifies the assertion. At what period was he not called to suffer, from his early leaving his father's house down to the hour when, in the anguish of his soul, he cried, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me?"

But this attribute belongs not to Jacob's life only. "*Man* is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." From this sorrowful experience none are exempted. Evil enters the palace as well as the cottage. Solomon, the happiest of mortals as to means and opportunities of enjoyment, tells us not only that "all is vanity," but "vexation of spirit." We are often tempted to discontent by comparisons; yet perhaps the very persons we envy are envying every one else. "The heart," and the heart alone, "knoweth his own bitterness." Let us not promise ourselves in life what life has never yet realized. No condition will answer a high degree of expectation.

Let us go forth into a new portion of our time, sober in our hopes with regard to creatures, but with confidence in God. If he is the rock, they are broken reeds. If he is faithfulness and truth, they, at their best estate, are altogether vanity. And that we may be prepared for all that awaits us, let us seek that grace which can sustain us in the evil hour of adversity, and turn death itself into a blessing. Without this all the evils of time will issue in the miseries of eternity.

"This seems a gloomy view of life." But is it not a true one?—Yet it is not unmingled with good, much good. Our mercies are new every morning. And it becomes us to be thankful that in a world so full of evil we have had, during the months we are closing, so many exemptions, deliverances, alleviations, and comforts.

Besides, this was not our original state, but the consequence of sin. Moral evil produced natural evil. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

This state too is not our final one—unless

we choose to make it so. The Gospel places within our view, and within our reach, regions of perfect blessedness, where it shall be said; "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more."

Nor should it be forgotten that the evils of life themselves are rendered useful. What is the effect of sin is also "the fruit to take away sin." The world, even as it now is, is capable of seducing the heart—What would it be if it presented nothing but attraction and indulgence? This changes the aspect of our condition; and not only prevents despondence and murmuring, but enables us to say, it is good for me that I have been afflicted. O how the suffering of the present time endears the Scripture! The throne of grace! The sympathy of Jesus! The glory to be revealed!

—Here is one alleviation more. If the days of our pilgrimage be "evil," they are "few." The brevity corrects the bitterness. The fight may be severe, but the warfare will soon be accomplished. The road may be rough, and the weather stormy, but our Father's house—our home is at hand! "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Amen.

ADVERTISEMENT.

At the conclusion of these Morning and Evening Exercises, it may not be uninteresting to some of his friends and readers if the author should remark briefly how a work which has had such an extensive circulation was commenced and completed.

He had passed between thirty and forty years of his ministry before he availed himself of a few weeks for an annual relaxation from his stated labours; and when he adopted the plan, those seasons were not with him entire cessations from engagement. Not only did he find the leisure useful to his health and spirits, and affording him opportunities for reflection and preparation for preaching, but he often employed a good portion of it in composition for the press. Several of his publications thus were begun, and others considerably advanced.

At Sidmouth he began his "Domestic Minister's Assistant," and wrote many of the "Family Prayers." In the Isle of Wight he composed "A Charge to a Minister's Wife," and "The Wife's Advocate." At Lynmouth he finished his "Christian Contemplated," and wrote the Preface with "Hints on Preaching."

But the latter place must be a little more noticed. There, for several years successively, he passed a month, the most perfectly agreeable he ever experienced in a life of loving kindness and tender mercy.

Lynton and Lynmouth are nearly connected; the one being at the top and the other at the bottom of a declivity, covered with trees and verdure, interspersed with several houses. Linton has been remarked for its sublimity, and Lynmouth for its beauty, and their united aspects have been called Switzerland in miniature.

Lynmouth to the author was the most interesting spot. There two narrow and cragged valleys, obviously once ruptured by a convulsion of nature, terminate, and down these, tumbling from rock to rock, two streams, one running from the east and the other from the south, unite, and then, in a small distance, empty themselves into the sea.

At the time of his first going there, it was hardly known or considered as a watering-place. It had not, therefore, fallen into the corruptions of such receptacles, nor had the inhabitants been taught to make visiters a prey. The villagers were very respectful, and strangers felt a sense of perfect safety. There the author fixed his residence. He took a whole cottage. It was neat and agreeable; and he had rural and enchanting scenery and solitude, yet not without some to hear the exclamation, "How sweet this solitude is!" for he had society too. His company was small, but suitable and improving.

"Where friendship full exerts her softest power,
Perfect esteem, enliven'd by desire
Ineffable, and sympathy of soul,
Thought meeting thought, and will preventing will,
With boundless confidence."

The author opened his parlour and spoke on the Lord's Day evening to the neighbours who would attend. But having been struck with the design, and also having been urged to undertake something of the kind, he now began his "Morning Exercises." Of those, he there often wrote two and sometimes three a day; and always read one of them in the morning and another at the evening devotions, and not without the approbation of his companions, which much excited and encouraged him to proceed.

There he composed the greater part of the "Morning Exercises;" and in after visits there he also wrote the greater part of the "Evening Exercises." He once thought of distinguishing by a mark all he had written in that retirement, but not doing it immediately, his recollection soon became too indistinct for him to decide with certainty. The first "Exercise" which he wrote was that which is entitled "*The Unlonely Solitude*," John, xvi., 32: "And shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." January 29, morning.

He wished, also, to have marked those which he wrote as he journeyed to and from Lynmouth. At Minehead, where he slept as he was going down, he wrote the Exercise called "*The Pious Excursion*," 1 Samuel, iii., 9: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" especially in reference to such a journey of recreation, September 3, morning. At the same place, as he returned, he composed the Exercise entitled "*The Call to depart*," Micah, ii., 10: "Arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest," September 29, morning. He also wrote a third Exercise at the same inn, "*Changes in the Wilderness not a Removal from it*," Numbers, x., 12: "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness at Paran," October 10, morning.

The author cannot conclude without observing, 1. That relaxation is never so perfectly enjoyed as in connexion with engagement.

"A want of occupation is not rest;
A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd."

Relaxation, indeed, can have no existence separate from employment, for what is there then to relax *from?* On the other hand, action prepares for repose; and labour not only sweetens, but justifies recreation, so that we feel it to be, not only innocent indulgence, but a kind of recompense.

2. That, as of such a precious talent as time nothing should be lost, so much may be done by gathering up the fragments.

Bath, 1842.

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